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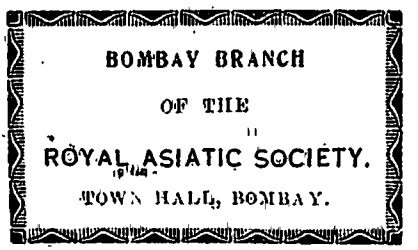

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FRONTISPIECE.

THE VESTIBULE, SURTSHELLIR.

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76

ICELAND;

ITS VOLCANOES, GEYSERS, AND GLACIERS.

By CHARLES S. FORBES,
COMR. R.N.

EE436
a1

"I beheld my shirt in mid air, arms extended, like a head and tailless trunk."
(See p. 230.)

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TRAVELS IN ICELAND.

CHAPTER I.

Prefatory.

It hath been considered a wholesome custom, time out of mind, by travellers modern and profane—though I doubt if the former be not the profaner of the two—to render to their readers the motives of their voyage.

I make this assertion on the authority of no less an individual than Dumas the elder, who, in the 'Exposition' with which he prefixes his 'Voyage en Suisse,' expresses his great respect for the said custom; but, instead of following it, offers us a certain cure for the cholera, and a proof of the infallibility of journalism; both very good things when found, but rather foreign to his trip, which he subsequently informs us was due to an indigestion, and, if traced to its source, would

be most probably fathered on some improver of Philippe or the Provençal Brothers.

For myself, I believe that few readers ever look at a preface, and prefer to plunge at once into cause and effect,—for which see next chapter.

CHAPTER II.

The "Leviathan" — Voyage commenced — Captain and passengers — First night on board — The Faroes — Stromoe — Thorshaven — Fort and garrison — Church — Outskirts — A boatman's home — Depredations of sailors — Skaapen Fiord.

FISH dinners often tend to quaint results, and sometimes, like the tide,—

"lead God knows where."

However, as in the present case the result arrived before the dinner, I trust no kind friend will be inclined to insinuate, after the fashion of Bon Gaultier,

"Bless your soul! it was the salmon; salmon always makes him so."

I had to assist at an entertainment at the Trafalgar one sunny evening last June, and, never having seen the "Leviathan," I concluded "to combine my information," and, driving down early, embarked amidst a phalanx of so-called jacks-in-the-water; but Father Thames being as usual in a rather clouded state, his children like himself seemed born of mud.

Streaming past the supposed Thule of our water-

rats with a strong flood, we were soon under the bows of Brunel's monster, immoveably chained as she appeared to be about half a mile further up the river.

Having admired her splendid entrance and noble proportions, the latter somewhat marred by her ungainly stern,—wondered at the gullibility of the British shareholder, and in what direction Brunel's audacious genius would next develop itself,—my eye, wearying of this endless iron mass, was drawn to some dozen small craft lying on the mud abreast, none of them as large as the quarter-boats this monster is to carry, but amongst whom greater activity seemed to reign, and my waterman informed me that they were fitting for the Iceland fishery. To visit their destination had been with me a day-dream since the time I revelled in 'Robinson Crusoe;' for, like many others, I had conceived it to be a "terra incognita" save to stray whalers and venturous Danes, until the genial author of 'High Latitudes' showed that English yachtsmen are often capable of greater deeds than an afternoon sail in the Solent.

One of these smacks, for such they proved to be, being a remarkably likely-looking craft, and, as it turned out, a noted Thames yacht of the previous season, I determined to brave in her the odour of salt fish and gratify my thirst for travel.

But, like many other things, it was not to be. On

my return to town I met an old friend, who briefly told me that he was just off.

"Where?" I exclaimed.

"To Iceland."

"When?"

"To-morrow."

"How?"

"By steamer from Leith."

"Then I'll come with you; what shall I bring?"

"Your oldest clothes, water-proof suit, gun and fishing-rod, and anything you may want to eat and drink, for you'll get nothing up there."

"What flies?"

"Dark."

"Very well," I added; "what train do you leave by?"

"The limited mail to-morrow night."

"Then I'll meet you at the station."

Here again I was doomed to disappointment. I could not obtain the requisite leave in time, and was condemned to see my friend start, and wait my chance in the following trip of the steamer, thereby losing one of the best months for a northern journey. However, knowing that if I put it off for another year I might lose the opportunity altogether—at any rate, of having a companion in those desolate regions—I eventually, on the morning of the 21st of July,

found myself on board the Danish mail steamer "Arcturus" groping our way out of the Forth in a fog which would have done honour to November.

Our vessel, a three-masted screw of some 280 tons and 80 horse-power, belonged to Messrs. Henderson of Glasgow, who have contracted with the Danish Government to carry the mails for five years between Copenhagen and Reykjavik during the summer months, calling at Leith on their outward and homeward voyage, and making about four trips in the season. She is clean and fast, and the Danish cheer provided is ample and wholesome. You will also find your bitter beer and Harvey sauce; but no luxurious man should make the trip, even if he can bespeak fine weather.

Our captain is a dapper little Dane, who, singularly enough, bought the lorcha "Arrow" of Canton notoriety after her seizure by the British Government, and for a time drove a thriving trade in her betwixt Hong Kong and Siam, but eventually lost her.

Our cabin passengers are an intelligent Lothian farmer, who has an apt quotation from Burns for any idea that anybody may start; an American professor and an American physician,—the former, although a martyr to sea-sickness, has come all the way from the States to examine the Geysers, and returns immediately, by way of Germany, for the purpose of

comparing notes with Bunsen the great chemist. A Danish Artillery officer, three of my countrymen, and myself; and we are all told. Forward, there are a few Icelanders returning to their native land, which they love like islanders, a common saying amongst them being "Island er hinn besta land sem solinn skinnar uppâ"—"Iceland is the best land on which the sun shines."

Abaft, all with the exception of myself say they are bent on doing the Geysers during the week's stay of the vessel in Iceland, and returning; but from a subsequent regardless display of white kids and varnished boots on the part of the Dane, he was evidently bound to the far north on a love "pigeon," and eventually was betrothed and returned without his bride, proving the existence of "stern parients" even in Reykjavik.

As we rattle by Peterhead on a clear, calm July evening, and thread our way through hundreds of herring-boats, whose nets we with difficulty avoid, the stereotyped British iciness begins to thaw in spite of our ever-increasing latitude; and the absurdity of buttoning oneself up in a species of Pall Mall inanition gradually yields to the genial influences of tobacco and travel, and engenders good talk. Solferino and rifle corps, the backwoods and Japan, help us on towards the small hours, and under

the rays of a waning moon one becomes well-nigh romantic, did not the return ticket supplied by the supercargo in the morning, and still in the breast-pocket of my shooting-coat, destroy the illusion, and remind one most forcibly that you must go a long way for romance in these days of steam. When you take your return ticket to Pompeii, enter Athens in a 'bus, and cannot even approach Jerusalem without some greasy Arab thrusting a hotel card in your face and touting his establishment with,—"Come to my hotel, sair; no bugs have got it,"—Byronism, as Thackeray justly tells us, is an anachronism and a sham, and Firdousi becomes the mere garnisher of three-volumed novelists.

Therefore, oh steward! some Geneva cold without, likewise my grego; and, coiled up on the cabin skylight, I with great content commence the first night of my Icelandic journey.

> "I go across the ocean-foam,
> Swift skating to my Iceland home
> Upon the ocean-skates,* fast driven
> By gales by Thurse's witch-wife given."
>
> *Saga of King Harald Greyskin.*—LAING.

July 23rd.—The weather is most propitious, and our trip is so far prosperous; the Faroe Islands, for which we shaped our course on leaving Shetland yesterday morning, are in sight, though still some-

* An expression for ships.

what distant, for the day is calm and cloudless, and their mountains and cliffs are lofty. It is noon ere we reach Nalsoe, one of the group, behind which Thorshaven, our destination, is ensconced. We have met no single sail since we passed the rickety hull of a huge American liner: she had just been hove off the rocks of South Shetland, and, with only two lower masts standing and patched-up sides, an energetic little tug was endeavouring to drag her down to Glasgow for repair. But for all this our voyage has not been lonely. Up to last night, when I went to bed, we were escorted by a troop of ravenous gulls, which had followed us from Shetland. They, however, have been relieved by a more varied, and, if possible, audacious crew, who, not content with hanging in our wake, seem ready to do battle for permanent quarters, and their numbers are momentarily increasing.

Their home lies ahead, and we are fast approaching it: a triangular group of lofty table-shaped rocks, cropping out of the Atlantic, about a third of the way between the Shetlands and Iceland, and composed entirely of old volcanic formations, which have been superimposed beneath the depths of the ocean, and by subsequent igneous convulsion driven up to, and far beyond, the surface of the water. The twenty-five islands of which this group consists

are so intimately related in formation and appearance, that they evidently were once a compact mass, in which upheaval has caused the rents, or rather fiords, by which they are now divided. In general these fiords are very deep, and vary from one to two miles in width, and are parallel to each other. Here the lay of the trap-beds and alternating strata may be distinctly traced from island to island in the face of the abrupt cliffs which in most parts bound their shores. And as we pass within a few hundred yards of the southern extremity of Nalsoe, the screaming of our feathery friends is relieved by the low moaning of the Atlantic swell in the numerous caves and fissures which it has hollowed out in the softer portions of the trap. One of these caverns pierces the island from side to side, and forms a natural arch with nearly 1000 feet of superimposed rock, offering a passage for small craft in fine weather. Immediately above the cliffs, nearly all of which are perpendicular, and averaging about 800 feet in height, stripes and patches of a vivid green form a pleasant relief to the eye, and pasture to a few sheep during the summer. These grassy holms are again capped with grey lichen-clothed terraces of the same trap formation.

Such, with little variation, save in altitude and extent, is the aspect of Sandoe and Stromoe. We

have now turned suddenly northwards, and, running between the latter island and Nalsoe, soon open up the town and port of Thorshaven, lying on the eastern side and immediately beneath the lofty range which forms the southern extreme of Stromoe, the largest and most important of the groups, and of which Thorshaven is the seat of government. We enter the little nook which is to afford us shelter for the night, and drop our anchor beneath the ruined fort, and my thoughts naturally wander back to the days of those old Norse sea-robbers, who a thousand years since adopted it as the rendezvous where they planned their piratical expeditions, which for centuries they carried on with comparative impunity, sometimes paying a scanty tribute to Norway, and now and then maintaining a wholesome sense of their dignity by occasionally murdering the collector and appropriating his vessel.

The town is, for the most part, perched on a slightly elevated promontory, which divides the upper portion of the harbour, and is not unlike one of those crow's-nests in the shape of villages which one sees crowning the summit of many a crag amongst the islands of the Greek archipelago; one house is huddled on the top of, and almost into another, as if town allotments were without price. The large white-washed storehouses at the extremity of the point

formerly belonged to the Danish Government, but are now the property of Danish merchants, the trade being no longer farmed, but entirely free.

In the background we see the church and the Governor's house, little differing from the surrounding buildings, save in being a trifle larger, for all are alike built of wood and coated with tar.

Along the rocky margin of the bay many women are visible, apparently employed gathering in a miraculous wash of shirts, for there are more bleaching than would suffice for the entire population, if they wore them; glasses, however, transform the shirts into split codfish, which the women are collecting and stacking, after their temporary exposure on a good drying day; for, next to the whale harvest, which is precarious, comes the cod-catching; it gives lucrative employment to the male portion of the population the greater part of the summer, and on it they chiefly depend for subsistence and their European supplies.

In the evening we land to explore the town and its environs. Our boat, which is native-built, is safe and roomy, but very greasy. Our boatmen, as they all are here, are very fine specimens of the species, well-made, and, with few exceptions, handsome, chiseled features, clad in close-fitting brown frieze jackets and trousers, of primitive cut and home manufacture,

with a jaunty cap as a head-dress; but though of a decidedly intelligent type, they seem overcome with a listless indifference. We land at the head of the right-hand bight, amidst the offal of cods and whales, which strew the shore in every direction, and, traversing a tortuous lane, reach the public library. Here is a quaint medley of all authors of all countries: Scott and Dickens jostle Silvio Pelico and Manon Lescault. It contains some thousand volumes, and is invaluable to the islanders during their dreary winter.

The fort next occupies our attention. It is well placed, but at present merely consists of the dilapidated remains of a square earthwork, in which are five disconsolate, antique-looking field-pieces, bereaved of their carriages. In the centre are the barracks of the garrison, consisting of a superannuated corporal, who, in utter contempt of all martial appearance, in his breeches and sleeves, scythe in hand, is carefully shaving the roof, the grass apparently growing more luxuriantly there than elsewhere. Mr. Bright was alone, wanting to complete this Utopian scene.

The garrison descended and slipped into a great-coat in honour of our arrival; he was not wanting in intelligence on the history of his charge, and told us how it was originally built by a Danish king in the

early part of the 17th century to protect the natives, who, since they had abandoned the piratical habits of their ancestors, had themselves been frequently despoiled by English, French, and even Turkish freebooters. During the American war these islands became a depôt for colonial produce, whence it was smuggled into Scotland. This led to the destruction of the fort by the British government, who sent a Captain Baugh up in the "Clio" sloop of war; he accomplished his mission without resistance. Subsequently, owing to our continued interruption of their trade, and consequently of their supplies, these wretched islanders were reduced to great straits; until, a more humane policy prevailing, their trade was countenanced under a nominal surveillance. Returning to the town, we next proceeded to investigate the church, an irregular wooden building with a belfry, but no pretensions to symmetry or architecture, built in the 17th century. Its interior was clean and simple, save over the altar, where a gaudy picture of some event to me indescribable offended the eye; the body of the church was ranged in seats after our more modern fashion, and a cumbersome gallery ran round its western and southern sides; this was wholly appropriated to the gentler sex, their oily partners being ranged below.

The small churchyard contained many old stones.

but I saw no Runic inscriptions: a few modern graves were tenderly cared for and cultivated with wild flowers; on one I saw a solitary rosebud, which must have been brought from Europe to clothe this cherished spot, and in its loneliness was more eloquent than the most cherished parterres of Père-la-Chaise, or the more hallowed monuments of Santa Croce. Emancipating ourselves from the filthy alleys by which it was surrounded, we emerged near some business-like stores on the southern side; here we found our American friends, who had purchased a few pounds of sugar-candy for what they termed the benefit of trade, and what I must be permitted to call for the ruin of their teeth and stomachs. The evening being still young, we breasted the hill at the back of the town in order to enjoy the view from its summit: our track lay past the cemetery, judiciously placed about half a mile out; near its foot, buried amidst a bevy of rocks, lay the Governor's garden, about fifty feet square, containing a few stunted shrubs and flowers, likewise the more useful potato, which, together with carrots and turnips, seemed much more adapted to the soil.

Here, following a watercourse, we traversed the large peat-moss which supplies the inhabitants with fuel; many men and boys were busily engaged cutting, stacking, and carrying their winter supply.

"We finally reached the summit, after startling a few blue hares out of their propriety, and disturbing the loves of sundry couples of rock-pigeons, which here abound. The view we obtained was extensive and panoramic, and included the principal portion of the entire group, skirted on all sides but the north with a boundless sea: at our feet lay Skaapen Fiord, through which we hoped to prosecute our journey on the morrow; then came Sandoe and the Dimon islets, with their inexhaustible store of puffins, and shores so steep that no boat can be kept there, their sparse inhabitants living in entire seclusion, saving an annual visit from the clergyman, who is hoisted up by ropes; beyond these again was Suderoe, with its deep bays and basaltic cliffs, differing in many respects from its northern neighbours; the climate is more genial, and the land more adapted to cultivation; its crops almost sufficing for the inhabitants, amongst whom there is a marked difference in dress and language. More industrious and favoured by nature, Qualboe, their principal village, is the first in the Faroes, and the shores of the bay in which it stands are not only amongst the most picturesque and fertile, but contain some conspicuous beds of coal.

To the west are the precipitous and weather-worn shores of Vaagoe and Myggenaes, together with numerous rocks and islets, the home of the solan

goose and endless varieties of sea-fowl; eastwards the southern point of Osteroe almost joins Nalsoe; and in the intervening fiord, so dangerous from its irregular and rapid currents, are scattered a few fishing-boats in search of their perilous harvest.

We descend, making a slight détour by the clergyman's house, situated at the brink of a waterfall on the left of the bay; and wending our way amongst some farm-homesteads where diminutive but healthy-looking patches of barley are waving, seek the house of our boatman, who has promised to procure us some caps and knives; the handles of the latter they carve ingeniously. His cot is of the better sort; externally it is adorned with goodly strings of whale-flesh and codlings drying for the winter; the only door opens into the kitchen, which, being without any legitimate channel for the exit of the smoke, save an irregular aperture crowned by a barrel in the roof, is grim and suffocating; the roof itself is pendent with whale-flesh and sea-birds, on which I presume the smoke is destined to exert a favourable influence; the floor is dank and in some places sloppy. Taking our hands, he welcomes us with a kindly unaffected air, but at the same time as much as to say,—"This is not so bad—is it?" Leading on through a still darker passage with a room on either side, he introduces us into the left-hand

one, evidently the strangers' room; it is clean, but fusty, for no air ever penetrates save that which has passed the ordeal of the kitchen. He displays his wares with a just pride, for he carved the knife-handles last winter whilst his wife wove the night-caps. The floor is boarded; in one corner is a tidy bed, and on a shelf under a small two-paned window is a bottle of brandy and solitary glass, with which he offers hospitality; on the opposite side a huge Danish sea-green box, on which figure a skiff under sail, a lady on horseback, and a couple of bunches of flowers; a clock of the same manufacture, evidently never intended to go, and which had stopped at eleven minutes to twelve, in, I should think, the early part of the present century; a tattered and gaudy print of a certain Hanoverian milliner completed the fixings. The odour is intolerable, and I leave my friends within bargaining, to seek the fresh air; but, en route, curiosity prompts me to inspect a seething caldron in which the family supper is simmering under the care of the good wife, whose dirty but healthy offspring are gaping in, half frightened and half amused at our invasion. Divining my intent, she kindly seeks to throw a light on the subject by offering me a home-made dip, and with a good-natured smile raises the lid and circulates the contents: first, amid a sea of grease, hot water, and

turnip-tops came a puffin with his beak on; then great nubs of whale, together with cormorants and seagulls *ad lib.* It was evidently not a fast-day; but, internally uneasy, I make a rapid exit, and seek the steamer, where I find a more congenial supper awaiting me.

Faroe, 24th July.—It blew a gale last night: here the wind arises apparently without cause or warning, and sweeps down the gullies and fiords with great violence. One of those smacks I saw off Greenwich in that pleasant June evening is lying near us; she ran in for shelter during the night: her master is in distress; four of his crew are in prison for theft, and a proper Whitechapel-looking set of birds they are; their entire claim to be termed seamen consists in the fact of their having donned a blue frock and trousers for the abandoned corduroy. Outrages of a similar description are far too common amongst our numerous fishing-smacks frequenting these coasts; this year they amount to a hundred and eleven souls. Their efforts are chiefly devoted to the sheep, which are ofttimes placed on the small detached islets to graze, where, as they cannot stray, no one is left to look after them. These modern freebooters are not slow to discover their locality, and, choosing a favourable day, they run in, land with their dogs and guns, help themselves, and are off, rendering detec-

tion impossible: the before-mentioned rascals had actually had the audacity to plunder a village. That morbid section of our countrymen who usually come to the front when the life of any notorious villain has been forfeited for consummating an unusually profligate life by beating out his wife's brains, will of course be ready to join in the stereotyped chorus regarding the poor sailor,—allowance must be made for them, they are without the light of the Gospel, and, after being cooped up so long in such miserable vessels, require a little recreation; but it appears to me that the barest savage would hesitate before he despoiled such a needy and hospitable population, people who share their last cup of milk with a stranger, and otherwise perform the good Samaritan. The disrepute such unmitigated brutality entails on our national character is very great; and it seems a pity that we do not follow the French system in Iceland, and send a man-of-war to keep such scoundrels in order.

These Faroe fisheries are comparatively in their infancy, and, as they have been very successful of late, will doubtless increase. The immense "bone-bed," as a bank is termed, on account of its being almost entirely composed of fish-bones, lies about twenty miles to the eastward of the group, and offers an inexhaustible supply of the finny tribes.

Shortly after midday, having completed the disembarkation of our cargo, we depart, and running round the southern end of Stromoe enter Skaapen Fiord. Here the scenery becomes more wild and magnificent: under the high land of Stromoe we observe the massive stone ruins of a large church, commenced during the ultimate years of the dominion of the Catholic faith in these parts, a faith which was supplanted by the Lutheran shortly after its adoption in Denmark. Its four walls have already braved three centuries, and are substantial enough to stand twice as many more. Nearly in mid-channel lies Hestoe, a large dome-shaped rock, with a diminutive farm on the western face, its only patch of green. Landing at the base of its precipitous shores seems to be impossible; on calm days it might be effected by aid of ropes, but it is certainly more adapted to be the home of the seagull than of man in his present form. Trothoved, a small detached block of basalt, lies right ahead; it appears to have slipped away from Sandoe the previous evening, so similar is its configuration to the adjoining shore; westward it opposes an unbroken front to the Atlantic 1500 feet in height, and, sloping gradually down, on the opposite side offers shelter and grazing to a small flock of sheep; rounding this, we feel the heavy swell caused by last night's gale, and soon leave the Faroes in a dense fog, and make a fair start for Iceland.

CHAPTER III.

Physical glance at Iceland — Vicinity of breakers — Run for the Westmann Islands — Yökuls — The Westmanns and their inhabitants — Eruption of 1783 — Anchorage of Reykjavik — The landing — First day in Iceland.

July 25th.—HERE we are steaming along in a perfect calm, without even the accustomed whale of the voyager in these latitudes to break the monotony of sea-life; let us take a physical glance at our destination.

Iceland is one-fifth larger than Ireland, and situated about 500 miles N.W. of Scotland, on the confines of the Polar circle, which bisects its northern extremities; and, unlike any other portion of the world of a similar size, Iceland owes its creation entirely to submarine volcanic agency. At some early period of geological history the nucleus of this island was thrown up from the depths of the ocean by volcanic power, as Sabrina and Graham's Islands were in the present century. With them the gradual formation of an island by submarine eruption was daily recorded. At first passing navigators feel shocks as of earth-

quakes, and observe the waters greatly discoloured and violently agitated; dense columns of steam arise, the sea around is covered with pumice and cinders, heralding the approach of the crater's mouth. Soon the cone itself appears, with a crater in the centre; scoriæ, pumice, and ashes accumulate; even non-volcanic substances appear; and eventually the cone becomes an island two hundred feet high and three miles in circumference. The exhaustion of the volcanic power, together with the effects of ocean and earthquake, again obliterate these islands, and nothing now remains but rocks and shoals to mark the spot. Magnify this gigantic effort a millionfold, and you will have a faint idea of the throes of Mother Earth when she brought forth Iceland from the womb of the Atlantic.

Fancy the cone struggling into existence against the pressure of an almost fathomless sea, reaching the surface, and ultimately maintaining its own against all comers, ocean, iceberg, and earthquake, and establishing itself over some 40,000 square miles of territory—such is Iceland. Since the form of the island is that of a flat ascending arch, attaining the elevation of 754 yards above the sea, near the centre, in a tract called the Sprengisandr, where the waters diverge north and south, that region may be considered to represent the centre of the an-

cient volcanic activity, in which thousands of cones and craters must have assisted over an illimitable period of time. This picture is strengthened by the singular configuration of the coasts, and especially the deep and narrow fiords, created by numerous streams of lava, which were originally subaqueously radiated from this common centre, and ultimately driven upwards to their present position by submarine power at various periods of elevation. Indeed, geologically speaking, the island is composed entirely of ancient and modern volcanic elements; the latter represented by a very broad, irregular band of trachyte, which bisects the island from its north-east to south-west extremity, and to which area all the manifest volcanic activity within memory has, with an isolated exception, been confined. To the right and left plutonic masses represent the earlier periods.

As may be imagined, such a country is but little adapted to the support of man, and one almost wonders why he ever went there. Its interior, as a whole, is one vast tract of lava-desert and ice-mountain—yökuls as they are termed: these occupy one-tenth part of the island, and never have been, and never can be traversed. Two tracks across this desert serve for communication between north and south; but not a blade of grass or

shrub exists in that death-like solitude—lava, lava, lava, is the eternal vista. The habitable coasts consist for the most part of marshy districts: there the Icelander builds his house, and collects the rank grass for his sheep and cattle; and on the banks of the numerous rivers which, from yökul and lake, pour into every fiord, more favoured patches are found, sometimes stretching a few miles into the interior: the whole affording a bare subsistence for the scanty population.

Grain will not ripen in their transient and uncertain summer, and must all be brought from Europe: even their grass-crop is often destroyed by the Polar ice, which in some years embelts the island, especially its northern and western coasts, and occasions such incessant rain that it is impossible to dry the hay. When this happens famine follows, for on their cows and ewes they principally depend for their sustenance during the long Arctic winter; dried cod's-heads being their only reserve; the bodies of the fish they are obliged to barter in exchange for European commodities—bread amongst the number, of which the masses, and that only in the parts adjacent to the trading stations, are able to afford more than one meal a week.

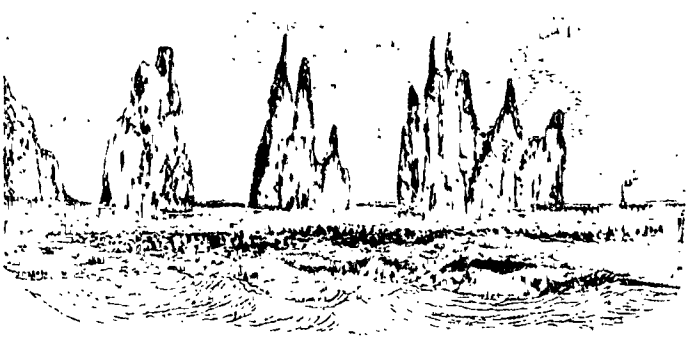
Paradoxical as it may seem, there are plenty of forests but no trees; for the natives dignify the vast

tracts of stunted birch-bushes, which are found in some parts, with that title, though they seldom average above six feet in height—never more than nine—and are useless but for fuel. The western and southern coasts are, however, plentifully strewed with drift-timber, swept up by that Gulf Stream, which, striking the south-west corner of the island, diverges right and left along its shores, and materially affects the climate, the usual winter in the southern districts not being more severe than in Denmark.

As for its active and dormant volcanoes, as well as the other various diurnal manifestations of volcanic power—as geysers, thermal waters, *suffiones*, boiling mud-caldrons, &c., all intimately connected and tending to prove the proximity of the internal heat—pages might be written illustrating the various systems which are most ably set forth in the works of Gaimard and Bunsen, but I prefer to investigate them in their several localities.

July 26th.—Groping our way through a dense fog at slackened speed, the first indication of land was the foam and the roar of heavy breakers on the rugged lava beach, somewhere in the vicinity of Skaptar Yökul, which the calm rendered both audible and ominous, proclaiming the great perils awaiting navigators on these tempestuous, iron-bound, and foggy coasts. Turning our head westward, we coasted cautiously

on at a respectful distance from these partially hidden dangers, and shortly, to the relief of our weary skipper, a bold promontory loomed through the haze, which he recognised immediately as Portland Head. It is the only high land on the southern central shores of Iceland that abuts on the sea, and is remarkable from a singular natural arch near its extremity, about a quarter of a mile in width, and of sufficient height to permit a frigate in full sail to pass beneath; as well as from a fantastic group of basaltic-looking nine-pins, semi-detached from its western shores.



Needles off Portland Head.

Our position ceases to be a matter of conjecture; we steam away for the Westmann Islands, lying some thirty miles further west, our first destination, weather permitting.

The dense fog began to lift and revealed this mysterious isle of sagas and sayings. Immediately above the long line of foam were spread apparently interminable lava-fields, intersected with numerous rivers, and in many places covered with moraine and detritus, while here and there a gigantic glacier, quitting its native gorge, stalked out in abrupt relief upon the plain, on its march towards the sea, as if in chase of the uncontrollable white torrent debouching from its bowels. And as the fog ascends, the black and tormented flanks of mountain and yökul appear, each looking more grim than the last —rent and distracted by fire, water, and earthquake, into every form conceivable and inconceivable,— conveying an idea of desolation and tribulation which must be seen to be realised.

To the east, Kötlugiâ Yökul's ever-icy summit calmly rests on the accumulated ruin of centuries of intermittent volcanic activity; for this distinguished of Icelandic volcanoes, not content with the destruction of man and beast, obliterated every vestige of terrain on which they lived by successive deluges of water and ice, of lava and ashes; and as if still un-

satiated with its destruction on land, created shoals and islands off the coast, which again have been destroyed by submarine convulsion.

Abreast of us, Solheima Yökul, in comparatively close proximity to the shore, and connected with the former by a lofty mountain range, including Myrdals Yökul, shelters a village of that name, and numerous homesteads scattered at its base, which to the uninitiated appear more like grassy hillocks out of place than the abode of civilised man. To the west the towering Eyafialla Yökul, and its adjacent colleagues, rear their drear and gaunt cliffs towards the sea, bisected with glacier and torrent—but all alike devoid of wood or verdure, save the scanty stripes and patches under Solheima.

Cap the mountain-tops with black, angry, watery clouds, and you have my first introduction to Iceland on a July day: for whilst to sea all was calm and clear, mist and fog seemed to claim the island as its own.

We are now passing Skogar-foss, one of the finest waterfalls in the island, which here rushes over the cliffs into the sea in one unbroken sheet of foam, some fifty feet deep by thirty broad. The Westmanns are also becoming more and more distinct; likewise the Drifanda-foss, or driving cascade, which is precipitated from the brow of the Eyafialla range

in a column of some 800 or 900 feet in height, and serves not only as a landmark to the Westmann islanders in their communications with the main, but also as a barometer. In calm weather, when the beach is accessible, the column is intact; but in stormy weather, and a landing impossible, the wind, eddying among the cliffs, converts the fall, though considerable, into a cloud of spray, which is dissipated in the atmosphere.

The Westmanns, now close ahead, are a scattered volcanic group, some fifteen miles from the main, and were once probably connected; they are for the most part of a barren columnar basaltic aspect, with deep water all round, save a reef of detached rocks that stretch far away to the southward.

The three northern islets are the largest, and in parts possess a scanty vegetation. The principal one, Heimaey, is inhabited, but of a most uninviting appearance, almost surrounded with high basaltic cliffs, and an otherwise iron-bound shore; its interior is covered with black ashy-looking cones, bearing undoubted evidence of recent volcanic action; in fact, the harbour, which lies on its north-east side, and is only accessible to small craft, is formed out of an old crater, into which the sea has worn an entrance. As we approach, the village and church become visible on a little grassy knoll on the left; a

few cattle and sheep, and a flagstaff, on which they welcome us by displaying a Danish ensign: these are the only signs of vitality, though the Icelanders on board from Copenhagen are loud in their praises of its fertility. Be that as it may, it has had the misfortune to attract the attention of English pirates, who despoiled them courteously, and subsequently of Algerines, who carried the inhabitants into captivity to the number of 400, thirty-seven of whom surviving were ransomed by the Danish Government, but not more than a dozen of them reached their native land, demonstrating the manifest advantage of living in those good old times of which we hear so much.

The present inhabitants are especially indebted to the puffin for their means of subsistence. Countless myriads of these quaint birds dwell in the crannies of the cliffs and crags around these islets, and endless is the war that is waged against them. The feathers of the puffin are bartered for the few necessaries and luxuries they procure from Europe, such as spirits and snuff, grain and salt, fishhooks and lines, which is about the extent of their stock-in-trade; their bodies form the staple article of food, a store being laid up for the winter, and when plentiful they are even used for fuel. Such a diet, seldom varied except with salt or dried fish, coupled with an inordinate use of corn-brandy of the most vile description, does

not fail to produce its results: disease and misery are prevalent,—new-born children seldom survive, generally perishing within the week from convulsions, and those that live are always sent to the main land to be reared, returning as adults. The scanty population is maintained by immigration.

As Icelanders through stormy weather are cut off from Europe, so the inhabitants of the Westmanns are cut off from Iceland, and it is seldom more than once a year that the mails are landed direct. The European letters are landed in Iceland at Reykjavik, and thence forwarded to the islands by boat, as chance may offer, for during the entire winter and the greater portion of the summer communication is impossible.

Having deposited our mail and a few packages, we run out amongst the northernmost rocks and islets, and shape our course for Reykianæs or Smoky Cape, the south-west corner of Iceland, some seventy miles further west. It is a lovely summer evening, and the water without a ripple; but although the ocean is calm and clear, the murky mist has complete possession of the main, otherwise Hekla and the western portion of the southern coast-range would encircle our northern horizon. The sun at last sinks into its ruddy bed, yet there is no perceptible change; day has merged into night without a shadow; and

after a long tournament at chess on the cabin skylight, we discover, to our astonishment, that it is past midnight.

July 27th.—Four o'clock in the morning finds us passing between the singular rock called the "Mealsack" and Reykianæs; the latter formed by numerous lava-streams, which here wend their way down from the Krisuvik district towards the sea; the former, a huge stumpy basaltic block, hove up in some submarine struggle of past ages. Here for sixty miles out to sea the volcanic power has from time to time manifested itself in the same continuous parallel which bisects Iceland in a south-west direction. Islands and reefs have been created and destroyed in the waters around us, and some detached groups and rocks exist at present—one appropriately termed the Elld-eyar or Fire Island.

In the year 1783—famous in Icelandic annals by the tremendous eruption of Skaptár Yökul—a submarine volcano burst out of the sea thirty miles south-west of the cape, and ejected so much pumice that the surrounding ocean was covered with it, and ships impeded in their course. Ultimately an island was formed bearing three distinct volcanoes. It was claimed by the Danes, and called Nyöe, or the New Island; but before a year had elapsed it sunk, and nought was left but a reef of rocks

from five to thirty fathoms under water. I particularise these eruptions, as they took place almost simultaneously, though nearly 200 miles apart, and serve to illustrate the extensive and intimate ramification of the volcanic power in these latitudes.

The sulphur range of Krisúvik forms the background of the main, and the steam from many a thermal source in that sulphureous district ascends in spiral columns on this calm and cloudless day. We pass many fishing-boats and fishermen's huts, scattered on the shores of this El Dorado of codfishers,—or, as it is called in Icelandic, the Guldbringe Syssel, or gold-bringing country, not from any evidence of the precious metal, but from the golden cod-harvests reaped on its shores,—and rapidly rounding the Skagen, we open out and enter Faxe Fiord. The mist which yesterday enveloped the island has entirely disappeared, and such is the intensity of the horizon in these northern latitudes on a clear and sunny day, that far away to the north the magnificent outline of the ever snow-clad Snæfells Yökul, springing apparently from mid-ocean, stands out in bold relief against as azure a sky as ever the Bay of Naples could boast of, and, though sixty miles distant, seems only a couple of hours' sail. The dim outline of an irregular snowy chain

J. W. Bushby.

SNÆFELLS YOKUL, FROM FAXE FIORD.

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skirts away towards the east, and imperceptibly merges into the rugged ranges about Borgar Fiord; these are again linked into the Esian, and that range, trending south, unites with the sulphur hills and craters of Krisuvik, forming a panoramic semicircle which our rapid progress develops in almost kaleidoscopic forms and tints: the latter caused chiefly by the moss and lichen clothing of many of the hills —the crimson and mauve varieties being the most brilliant.

On our right, in strange contrast, lies an almost interminable jagged lava-field, suddenly iced in the midst of its red-hot vagaries—rent, twisted, twirled and tormented in every possible and impossible form. It stretches away for nearly thirty miles to the foot of the black cinder-belching cones of Krisuvik, which in ages past poured forth the seven streams of which this field is composed; and it now forms the south-western extremity of the island.

Straining our eyes towards the crown of the bay, in the vague hope of discerning the harbour and town of Reykjavik, the modern capital, as it is somewhat facetiously designated, we discover a stray building or two amongst a very limited number of grassy knolls, here and there dotted along the shores; these the captain tells us are churches and stores.

As we near our haven, the position of which is still an apparent mystery, though we are assured it lies at the foot of yon purple hills, we pass the entrance of Havna Fiord, and many other unimportant creeks and crannies which the ocean seems to have opened up among the lava-field, or perhaps, more properly speaking, the lava has appropriated from the ocean. Shortly the masts of vessels are observed, rising out of the centre of the lava-field; and passing the village of Bessastad, famed for its church and school, we shoot round the Ness and open out the bay and town of Reykjavik, looking much more like some half-abandoned colonial location, that the energetic portion of the inhabitants had left for the diggings, than the metropolis of a community a thousand years old. It is still separated from us by reefs and islets: amongst these we wend our way to the anchorage, now enlivened by the presence of two French men-of-war, the "Artémise" and "Agile," stationed here for the succour of their large fleet of fishermen. They are looking taunt and gay, though in Iceland, and present a quaint contrast to the half-dozen pre-Adamite-looking Danish coasters which represent the commerce of the capital. Reykjavik testifies its appreciation of our arrival by a copious display of bunting, in which the coasters participate; our advent is one of the four red-letter

days of the year—each caused by the same event, the arrival of the steam mail. They who have never been beyond the immediate influences of Rowland Hill may not be able to comprehend the emotions that all those in distant climes experience on the appearance of this most potent postal link attaching them to their mother-land: but to me it was no wonder then that the inhabitants—all the well-to-do portion of whom are Danes, and perhaps a few educated, or rather Europeanized, Icelanders, and who certainly, whatever may be their professions of love for their own land, pass as much of their time as possible at Copenhagen—should place themselves en fête, quit their fishy stores, and line the beach to gape at and discuss the new arrivals, assist at the disembarkation of the mail, and eagerly besiege the Post Office.

Neither were the Frenchmen behindhand: an officer was soon on board, to whom I was subsequently indebted for many a happy hour, and I imparted to him the news of the sudden peace and the Villafranca treaty, adding that Europe, and the Italians especially, were dissatisfied. He replied, "Oh! the Italians must not expect too much; the Emperor's position is very difficult." And I certainly could not help thinking that, considering the Italians had never before helped themselves, a great deal had been done for

them. Though the inherent pugnacity of England might be ruffled by having to contemplate a European broil without embarking in it; and though we had undoubtedly in '48 created and fostered revolution in the Italian peninsula, to be as speedily abandoned, we had no right to complain. For, if fine orations could either have saved or regenerated Italy, it would have long since been accomplished by that section of our politicos who conceive every existing community fitted for the constitutional system, and would legislate accordingly for Cockneys and Caffres in the same breath; and who, though they may fancy themselvs above the folly of going to war for an "idea," can hardly already have forgotten the struggle they committed themselves to for the "Integrity of the Ottoman Empire." But "Sire," as St. Arnaud wrote after the Alma, "your cannon have sounded," your ships are bedizened with flags, and twenty-one guns have announced your imperial will to the dumbfoundered natives and echoing hills of Iceland. Verily you understand your epoch, so ably expounded by Helps, in which it is only necessary to do a thing moderately well, and get it very well talked about.

Having procured with some difficulty a slimy and aged fishing-boat with a boatman to correspond, I, in company with my portmanteau, guns, and fishing-rod,

together with a barrel or two of creature comforts, made for the nearest pier; on the extremity of which, in spite of a rising tide, my friend deposited me and went quietly about his business without asking for payment, evidently conceiving that he had done me a friendly turn, and that I must now look to myself. I had no alternative but to leave my traps where they were, and endeavour to find out the hotel; for the landlord, believing in the proverb that "good wine needs no bush," displayed neither sign nor name. However, it was soon found, and not a bad one either, considering the locality, and kept by a quondam butler and lady's-maid of the Governor. Here I was delighted to find a letter from my friend, who shortly after made his appearance from Krisuvik, looking very like a backwoods loafer, covered with mud from head to heel, the effects of a rapid ride over one of the worst roads in the country.

My fellow passengers, six in number, who have come up to do the Geysers and return by the same trip of the steamer within the week, are immediately at work to procure ponies, and arrange for an early start in the morning, which they fondly imagine indicates some early hour. But in Iceland the term is merely used in an indefinite manner, and means that if you are fortunate you will probably start some time during the following day; their ideas of time, as well as

on most other points, being rather vague. For my part, having a couple of months before me, I was inclined to take it easy—hang about the town and its environs for a few days—make the acquaintance of the inhabitants and French officers—in short, review my position, and make arrangements for the campaign—and was much disappointed to learn that it was not only a very bad year for salmon, but that they had taken off much earlier than usual: a fact generally attributed to the vast masses of Polar ice which had been swept down in the spring, and still clung to the northern and north-western shores of the island in a compact belt some thirty miles broad. This had materially affected the temperature of the waters, as well as the climate; and instead of their fine, or comparatively fine summer, they had had nothing but storms and incessant rain. On this pack they had received an importation of thirteen Polar bears, but, weak and emaciated from want of food after their long sea-voyage, they were speedily despatched on landing. One of these brutes made his entrance into a peasant's hut on the north-west coast in rather an unceremonious manner. The snow being on a level with the roof, Bruin found himself there in his travels in quest of food. Attracted, I imagine, by the redolent odour from within, he commenced scratching, and eventually went headlong

through, scaring the entire family. The poor beast, however, scarcely less frightened, was speedly despatched and eaten, the fate of everything the natives can lay hands on during the winter months. In the evening we made a perfect round of visits, and were everywhere received most hospitably.

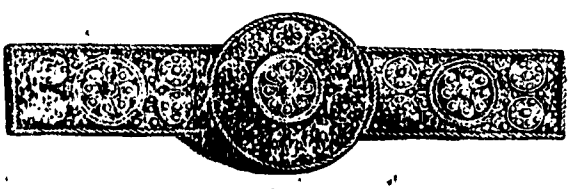
Fishers' Huts.

CHAPTER IV.

Thea, the maidservant — Gear, the geyser-guide — Reykjavik hotel — View of the town — Visitors — Late and substantial breakfast — Preparing for the geyser-trip — Grand ball — Historical sketch — Form of government — Greenland colonised — Discovery of America — Colony of Vineland — Icelandic literature — Norwegian subjugation — Romish innovations — Plague and pestilences — English settlers — The printing-press and the Reformation — Present state of Iceland.

July 28th.—MORNING dawns, and I am startled by a living apparition in the form of Thea, the maid, who deposits a bowl of *café au lait* worthy of the Boulevards within reach of my pillow. She is a fair, flaxen-haired girl, of some sixty-six inches — *viso sympatico*—clad in a close-fitting sort of brown frieze gown of home manufacture, with nought to distinguish her from the European but her silver waist-belt and the native cap, which is very coquettish; her hair is pendent in two large plats behind; and her beaming blue eyes proclaim the goodness of her disposition. Poor creature! she was up until three this morning, and now it is only six, but she looks as well and is as carefully dressed as if she passed a life of ease; however, she sleeps all the winter, like every one else in these parts. She tells me it is time to

rise, but my bed is undeniable—eider-down above, eider-down below—and am I not in the land of eider-down, and have not I been out of a four-poster these nine days—shall I not sleep? My British nature prompts me to early rising, but I have long ago concluded that without any definite object you should always take your ease, and give Nature a chance when she is so disposed; your systematically early riser is always vain and sleepy.



The Cincture of Thea's Belt.

Towards noon the emphatic language of my fellow passengers beneath the window precludes all further rest. They are engaged in a violent altercation with Mr. Gear, the guide for the geysers. They were to have started at six this morning: Thea gave them breakfast at that hour. But Gear speaks English well—he is the only guide who does; he much regrets that the ponies have not all been found, and intimates that when they are found their shoes must be looked to. He is profoundly grieved; but Icelanders never are in a hurry: it is one of their national failings, which, being half

a Hungarian, he does not fail to enlarge upon. Be that as it may, he is master of the situation, though I believe his wife is not wholly powerless, and wishes him to mend the window-frame and preside at the midday meal.

Here, my conscience getting the better of me, I jump into my pajamas, and, lighting my weed, proceed to survey the premises. We occupy what I suppose in an American hotel would be termed the bridal suite: a very fair sitting-room, with a good bed-room on either side, on the first and only floor, evidently the best rooms in the house; above there is a species of cockloft, below a billiard-room, whence came that confou ded clicking of the ivory balls which worried my early hours last night. Our locality is about four hundred yards above the Strand, and we have the harbour and Esian-range right in front: across the road is an ancient burial-ground, containing one solitary cross, for extramural interment is of older date in the far north than our own metropolis; and if we could only see through the back of the house, we should discover a very pretty and well-tended cemetery lying on the rising ground to the left of the town; at its foot runs the "passeo," a rather rugged one it is true, stretching away towards Bessastad. There the *beau monde* disport themselves in the summer evenings—

that is, if it does not rain; and fans and flirtings take their course as in more southern climes.

Hunger now prompts me to see if my friend is on the rise. I enter his room softly, but he is still sleeping the sleep of the blessed—the effects of his long ride yesterday and previous fatigues at Krisuvik, where he has been leading the life of the damned inspecting his sulphur-mines. His window looks to the east; Gear's house is immediately below it; in its courtyard thirty or forty ponies are assembled for the trip to the Geysers, and wild confusion seems worse confounded. Beyond is the cathedral, an unsightly bit of stuccoed Gothic, plaster falling off externally, and internally mouldy; but it contains a font by Thorwaldsen, a present from that artist in acknowledgment of his Icelandic parentage. On its right is a lake, which waters the natives in the summer and skates them in winter, freezing to the bottom though some eighteen feet deep. At the back of the church, on the rise of the hill, that vast ungainly two-story business is the Althing, or house of assembly, distinguished, like another representative house, for its large amount of conversation and small amount of action; it likewise has its Hansard. Close to the beach stands the substantial, lava-built, one-storied house of Count Trampe, the governor, separated from the church by a green patch of an

acre or so in extent; the Bishop lives on one side and the French Consul on the other. Between our hotel and the sea lies the mass of the town, or rather village; the streets are regular and at right angles. Away to our left is the fishing-suburb; the houses generally are one-storied and built of plank brought from Norway, well tarred and often canvas-roofed, with a small kitchen-garden either in front or rear, in which flourish potatoes, carrots, turnips, and here and there the domestic cabbage; in one I saw currant-bushes, and the fruit almost at maturity. It appeared to me that with a little industry they might be much better provided.

I could tell you more, but visitors keep dropping in, and I have to play the host as I advance in my toilet: all are genial and genuine. The French Consul insists on our dining with him; young Carl Trampe, an ingenuous youth, says we must dance at his house afterwards: in vain I say that I have no "chicken fixings." Dr. Hjaltelin insists on planning out an Icelandic campaign for me. In short, time flies pleasantly, and, eventually, my friend and self sit down to a public breakfast at the respectable hour of 4 P.M.: not the sponge-biscuit and glass of sherry of the used-up, but broiled salmon which wriggled into the fisher's-box last night, followed by a dish of golden plover, the whole washed down with

a clean St. Julian—and this is the land where I was told I should find nothing, and had better bring with me whatever I wanted to eat and drink. Our host has provided all this, and yet apologizes.

We descend and inspect the cavalcade for the Geysers: some ten men mounted, and ten more ponies laden with baggage, to say nothing of twenty more which will be driven ahead to serve as a relief. They are sturdy little beasts of twelve hands, of every colour horse is heir to. After sundry tightenings of girths and readjustments of baggage, they at length move on in good order; but our American friends are not yet thoroughly initiated into the mysteries of pig-skin.

July 29th.—We had a great ball entirely last night! Society here is purely Danish—a mere reflection of Copenhagen, or any other town in the north of Europe. A few Icelanders joined, but they are intermarried into Danish families, whose language is universally spoken. To-day I have been studying charts and maps, with a view of arranging a tour of the island; but find that all the great natural phenomena, with the exception of the mud-caldron of Krabla, are concentrated in and about the south-west portion of the island, and learn, from Icelanders who have recently arrived from the eastern districts to attend the Althing now sitting, that all

the large southern yökul rivers were greatly flooded, and that consequently my proposed journey could not be accomplished with any degree of certainty as regards time: I determined therefore, somewhat reluctantly, to confine myself to the above-named district, in which all the active volcanic eccentricities of the island are more intensely developed, with the above solitary exceptions, of which there are numerous specimens on a smaller scale. M. Véron, the commander of the French squadron, having invited my friend and self to join in a shooting party to Thingvalla, the site of the historical glories of the ancient republic, as well as of one of the most singular freaks of nature in this or any other part of the world, I conclude to devote the next week to Reykjavik and its environs, and try my fortune in the salmon river at the head of the bay, about three miles distant.

Before proceeding further it may not be irrelevant to give a slight sketch of the colonization and history of this island, which differs essentially from that of other nations that flourished at the same period: the struggles of chieftains and their followers giving place to the picture of man struggling with the elements for a miserable existence, and early acquiring, and preserving for a considerable time, the advantages of civilization, literature, and religion.

These facts give a moral interest to the history of Iceland, and invest it with a charm which it would not otherwise possess; and the most incurious cannot look with indifference on the spectacle of a people, seemingly condemned by nature to spend their lives in laborious poverty and ignorance, becoming the poets and historians of the age, and creating a national literature amidst the perpetual snows and lava-fields of this remote island.

Obscure notices of Thule occur in Greek and Roman authors, and Strabo mentions the voyage of one Pytheas, a Marseillais, to the far north and the island of Thule; and a passage in the Venerable Bede has led many to believe that Iceland is the Thule of the classics: but from the entire omission of the most characteristic features of Icelandic scenery, and other circumstances, it is very doubtful whether Thule had ever any fixed locality, but was merely an indefinite term applied to the then known northern regions, and probably should be sought amongst the islands to the north and west of Scotland. Saxo Grammaticus, however, speaks of the general industry and love of literature exhibited by the Tylenses, by which name he designates the people of Tyle, Thule, or Iceland.

Nine hundred and eighty-six years ago, some gentlemen in Norway, riled with the despotic sway of Harold the fair-haired, determined to abandon the

country of their birth, and, like the Pilgrim Fathers, seek a home where they might at least preserve their rights and independence.

A Norse pirate of the period, one Naddodr, had about fourteen years previously, whilst endeavouring to find the Faroe Islands,—where he had established himself as a viking, or sea-robber,—owing to a trifling error of about 400 or 500 miles in his reckoning, discovered a mountainous coast; he landed, investigated the surrounding country, and, finding nothing worth plundering, but ice and snow in abundance, dubbed it Snowland, and departed.

On his return to Norway, in spite of his drear account, another of that restless ilk—one Gardar—sallied forth to investigate this haphazard discovery. He landed and built him a house on the north side of the island, in Skial Fiord, and there wintered, calling the place Husavik, a name it still preserves. The following summer he succeeded in circumnavigating the island, and, wishing to perpetuate his exploit, called it after himself—Gardarsholm.

He was speedily followed by a much more distinguished member of his craft, Floki by name, who, though a pirate by profession (vikingr mikil), was rather superstitious, and before sailing offered a great sacrifice to Thor, and consecrated three crows, which he carried with him, to act as pilots.

He called at Shetland and Faroe, and, having arrived, as he conceived, in the vicinity of Iceland, he gave one of the birds liberty—it immediately took wing towards Faroe. Inferring from this his unadvanced position, he sailed on, and then had recourse to a second—it soared high, but did not like to leave the barque, and returned: and this old salt accordingly sailed on again. A few days afterwards he freed the third, which winged its way in the supposed direction of the wished-for shore. Floki followed, and soon found the eastern coast—at least, so say old chroniclers, and with some truth perhaps, for he subsequently bore the surname of Rafna Floki, or Floki of the Ravens. This worthy spent two years in exploring the island, and from the quantity of drift-ice he found on its northern shores re-christened it Iceland and returned.

To this inhospitable region Harold's sturdy malcontents determined bodily to emigrate, for their decisive defeat at Hafurs Fiord had destroyed all hopes of liberty at home, and they were too proud to pay a heavy tribute and live in dependence, especially when their countrymen, who kept up a communication with Iceland, told them that its rivers swarmed with fish, and such was the richness of the soil that the very "grass dropped butter." Hence the colonists of this isle were not the refuse of the mother-

country, but of the best and bravest, who sought to secure amid the ice and desert of the north that which they could no longer hope to enjoy at home; and it is truly said New England and Iceland are the solitary instances of colonies being founded and peopled from higher motives than the love of gain.

Organising their exodus under Ingolf, a noble who had been previously condemned to banishment for the murderous results of several "differences" in which he and his cousin Leif had been engaged, they first despatched him to explore the nakedness of the land; and eventually gathering together their scanty chattels,—a few sheep and fewer cattle, together with the sacred pillars of Ingolf's dwelling and their idolatry,—these voluntary exiles embarked under his guidance from the vicinity of Tronhjem, A.D. 874, in search of their island-home on the confines of the Arctic circle, in bottoms as inferior to the "Mayflower" as she was to the modern clipper. And when it is considered that the colonists, coming by way of Shetland and Faroe Isles, performed a voyage of from 700 to 800 miles, in vessels little better than open boats, and that there is no mention made of any shipwrecks, one is almost tempted to exclaim, with the pious Arngrim Jonsen, that "Providence watched over them and guided them, like the Israelites of old,

from Norwegian slavery, through the immense and raging ocean, to this Canaan of the north."*

Their superstitious chief made the south-eastern corner of the island, and, being advised of his local oracle before starting, pitched the aforesaid pillars into the sea, with the intention of fulfilling the vow he had previously made, that wherever they were cast ashore there he would fix his future home. His good intent was for the time frustrated, as he was parted from his penates in a sudden squall, and forced to locate himself on a neighbouring promontory, which to this day bears the name of Ingolfshofde. Here he sojourned three years, when his servants, whom he had despatched alongshore in search of the missing pillars, returned with the joyful news that they had found them opposite my bedroom window: they had been cast up on the beach of the present site of Reykjavik, whither he instantly removed, in spite of his servants having discovered many more promising spots along the coast.

Ingolf's great friend and relative Leif was shortly after murdered by his Irish slaves, whom he had acquired in a predatory descent on that coast. He was pleased to remark, "It was a pity that such a decent man should fall by such villains, but that he could expect little else, since he neglected the

* Landnâmabok, or Book of Occupation, p. 379.

'rites.'" However, he consoled himself by killing the murderers and increasing his territory.* It is related how he went the way of all flesh, and at his own request was buried on a hill on the banks of the Olvusa: he chose that elevated position in order that when dead he might have a better view of the land of which he was the first inhabitant.

Such are the chronicles handed down in the Landnâmabok, one of the earliest records of Iceland, compiled by Are Frode and other trustworthy writers of the twelfth century. There are also vague allusions to a colony of Christians being found by the Norsemen on the southern shores of the island, on their first arrival: the above writer alludes to them as the Papæ, and tells of crosses, belts, and records in the Erse (?) language; and further, that, disgusted with their idolatrous neighbours, they migrated. Certain it is that some places bear Irish names —as Patrix Fiord, for instance; but there is no reason why they should not have been of later adoption. From the minute attention to detail, and the early period at which the Icelanders commence their history, the previous picture, though not entirely free from uncertainty, is most probably nearer the truth.

This venturous band of colonists were rapidly recruited, owing to the tyranny of the Norwegian

* Landnâmabok, pp. 10-19.

monarch, who at first patronised the movement, but subsequently, alarmed at the drain of population, levied a fine of four ounces of silver on all who left his dominions to settle in Iceland: despite this, in about half a century its shores were peopled to a degree fully equivalent to the means of subsistence the country afforded.

From the before-mentioned Landnâmabok, which gives a minute account of the colonization of the island, together with a profusion of genealogical detail, it appears that besides the Norwegians many Danes and Swedes, Scotch and Irish, at this period chose Iceland as their place of abode.

The Norwegians brought with them their language and idolatry, their customs and historical records, which the other colonists, from paucity of numbers, were compelled to adopt. A udal system,* after that of their own country, was speedily created; but every leader of a band of emigrants being chosen, by force of circumstances, as the acknowledged chief of the district occupied by himself and companions, speedily paved the way for a demi-feudal system of vassalage and subservience.

The small belt of grass-producing land which generally fringes the shores of Iceland, and in a

* Udal right, or adel—that is, noble right—by the same right the king held his crown.—*Laing's Heimskr.*, vol. i. p. 47.

few places, following the banks of some river, stretches some miles into the interior, became speedily occupied; and fresh bands of emigrants continually arriving, endless contests between these petty chiefs arose for the better pastures and fisheries. The Norwegian monarch advised that no man should be allowed to appropriate or possess more land than he could surround with fire in one day.* The patriarchal form of government now became insufficient; and the necessity of some system whereby the feelings and interests of the various communities might be represented becoming more and more apparent, a semi-aristocratic commonwealth was established; this happened about fifty-four years after the arrival of the first colonists, and the national will was embodied and represented by the supreme general assembly of Iceland, called the Althing, from *al*, all; and *thing*, a forum. They met annually on the shores of the Thingvalla Lake, under an elective president, and continued to do so for upwards of three centuries, —of which more anon.

All things are good when old, says the poet; and

* Landnâmabok, p. 322. The manner in which this was done was either for a man to run round the boundaries with a torch, setting fire to the grass at the extremities—or a fire was kindled in the centre at six o'clock in the morning, and the chief occupied as much ground as he could encompass before the same hour in the evening, keeping always in sight of the smoke.

I conclude, on the strength of this, some mystic minds have termed this the golden age of Iceland: but making every allowance for the halo of antiquity, one obvious peculiarity presents itself: elsewhere the process towards regular government was gradual, and every step was made through contest and bloodshed. In Iceland all was effected by a single simultaneous and peaceful effort; and unmolested by external ambition, well-directed laws provided justice and social order, whilst education, literature, and poetic fancy flourished.

Commerce was pursued with ardour and success, and, inheriting the maritime spirit of their ancestors, Greenland was discovered and colonised by them one hundred and twenty years after their first landing. One Gunnbiörn, driven off the west coast by successive gales, first discovered the mountains of Greenland; he does not appear to have landed, or even approached the shore, and no further notice of it is made until (A.D. 986) Eric the Red, who was banished for the numerous manslaughters he committed, first explored the country, and afterwards founded a settlement that flourished for more than four hundred years, records of which were handed down uninterruptedly until the beginning of the fifteenth century.

Eric gave it the name of Greenland, in order to

create a favourable impression of its fertility amongst his countrymen, and induce them to emigrate. Ultimately not fewer than twenty-five vessels left Iceland under his convoy, but of these only fourteen reached their destination, the rest were either driven back or lost. The distance between the two countries being little more than two hundred miles, a regular intercourse was established between them, and the number of settlers increased so rapidly, that soon after their adoption of Christianity, about 1000 A.D., a number of churches were built on the east coast, and a bishop appointed: he had his residence at Gardi, and was a suffragan of the Archbishop of Tronhjem, in Norway. A monastery dedicated to St. Thomas was also erected at another small town, called Albe, and for the space of 350 years a regular trade was kept up with Denmark and Norway. In the year 1406 the last bishop was sent over to Greenland; since then the colony has not been heard of, and its loss, or rather destruction, is attributed to the wars then raging between the Danes and Swedes, which prevented the trading vessels, on whom they depended for their supply of grain, from putting to sea. Previously, in 1350, they had been greatly reduced in physique and numbers by the black death, which did not spare these northern latitudes; the Esquimaux also harassed them with repeated attacks.

One more maritime adventure, and that again accidental, completes the discoveries of these venturesome Norsemen—I mean the pre-Columbian discovery of America. In A.D. 1001 Biorni Heriuffson, on a voyage to Greenland to join his father, was driven by unfavourable winds toward the S.W., and discovered a flat, woody coast, which, from subsequent circumstances and the original narrative, we may infer to have been that of Labrador. Not being able to persuade his men to land, he, with a south-west wind, in six days reached Greenland.

Attracted by these reports, Leif, the son of Eric the Red, who had first colonized Greenland, returned to Norway, fitted out a vessel suitable to the trip, with a crew of thirty-five men, and, starting from Greenland, reached the coast that Biorni discovered. He continued his course towards the southward, and reaching a strait which separated a large island from the main, found a snug harbour, where, the country being fertile and pleasant, he hauled his vessel up and hutted himself for the winter, which he found milder and the days longer than in Greenland. On the shortest day the sun was above the horizon from "dagmal" to "eikt," that is from 7·30 A.M. to 4·30 P.M., making the day equal to nine hours, and consequently placing his position a little to the northward of the pre-

sent site of New York. A South countryman, Tyrker, one of the crew, wandering into the interior, found quantities of wild grapes, whence they gave it the name of Vineland. In the spring Leif returned to Greenland, and was succeeded in the enterprise by his brother Thorvald, who explored Vineland and the adjacent coasts. In the course of the third summer he was slain in a quarrel with the natives, whom they contemptuously styled Skrælings (chips or parings), from their diminutive stature. Shortly afterwards a colony was planted on these the American shores by Thorfin, an Icelander, and a regular trade with the natives in furs, skins, &c., established. Records were carried down to the twelfth century, when a Bishop of Greenland visited the colony, and promulgated the faith. Since that period the fate of the colonists is lost in conjecture.

Such is the history of Vineland given us by the Icelandic historians: it is interesting, not merely as connected with the two countries, but because it proves that America was known to Europeans five hundred years before the Genoese mariner set foot on its shores.

Various speculations are rife as to Columbus's having visited Iceland, and there acquired the information which induced him to cross the Atlantic.

Humboldt, in his 'Cosmos,' regards it as an established fact, and the time is placed in February, 1447, and that he started from Bristol, between which port and the north a considerable trade then existed.

But to return to the history of the heathen age in Iceland proper, now about to be terminated by the introduction of Christianity (A.D. 981) through Frederick, a bishop from Saxony, and other missionaries. At first they experienced much opposition, and were subject to poetical satire and personal violence; but, after many vicissitudes, the Christian religion was finally adopted by the National Assembly in the spring of A.D. 1000. The first school in the island was established in the middle of the 11th century. To that century and the two following ones the flower of Icelandic literature pertains, and it may justly be termed the independent and literary age of Iceland. Their skalds, or minstrels, travelled much, and were attached to the suites of the warrior Norse princes, who, besides wandering over the coasts of Europe, penetrated into Russia, the Holy Land, and northern shores of Africa.

Their early sagas or poems were handed down orally; but the introduction of the Roman character speedily followed Christianity, and all pre-

vious traditional lore was at once committed to writing.

The principal amongst them are the Landnâmabok, or Book of Occupation, containing the history of the colonization, in which are found the names of some 3000 persons and 1400 places, attesting the existence of written documents, for no memory could contain such detached particulars; and the before-mentioned saga of Eric the Red, containing the colonization of Greenland; as well as the Heimskringla of Snorro Sturleson, in which he not only embodies the history of his own nation, but also that of contemporary ones. Older than these again were the writings of Are Frode (1122). Next in importance comes the Sturlunga Saga by Sturle Thordsen: it gives the history of those civil contentions in the island during the 11th and 12th centuries which led to its final subjugation by the Norwegian monarchs.

In the 11th century internal evils sprang up; the various families in possession of the hereditary magistracies became more and more potent, and the aristocratic basis of the government generally merged into an oligarchy. Numerous contests arose amongst the more powerful chieftains; might became right, and the arbitration of the sword was substituted for law and justice. Supported by their followers, the Althing often became a battle-field,

and the subsequent annals of Iceland are a mere record of rapine, sedition, and bloodshed.

'The Norwegian monarchs had previously made abortive attempts, through the priesthood, to subjugate the island; encouraged by internal division, they now renewed their attempts, fostering the power of the celebrated Snorro Sturleson, who, by marriage and descent, had become by far the most powerful chief and proprietor. He traitorously leagued himself with Hakon, King of Norway, for the subjugation of the island; but was assassinated before he could accomplish his designs.

Numerous chiefs, of nearly equal calibre, perpetuated this miserable system: by summer and winter their implaceable hatreds found vent in battle and plunder; provinces were destroyed, and neither age nor sex spared. Hakon, constantly referred to for support and advice, was not slow to avail himself of this fair opportunity of carrying out his long-cherished scheme, making the clergy, who were spiritually subject to the see of Tronhjem, his principal agents. Relying on the dissatisfaction of the people, he now openly treated for the surrender of the island (A.D. 1254), and the middle of the 13th century was signalized by the transfer of the island to the Norwegian crown, after three hundred and forty years of independence.

With the exception of a nominal tribute, this was rather an alliance than a surrender of their rights; regular treaties were made; all property secured, together with their ancient laws; free commerce with Norway, and government by a viceroy, were also stipulated for; and any infringement of these conditions was to exonerate them from their oath of allegiance.

The crown of Hungary was acquired by the Hapsburgs under nearly similar circumstances.

With their annexation to a European monarchy perished the vigour, restlessness, and activity which had characterised their forefathers; their literature gradually expired; and though they still had their representative government at Thingvalla, the national spirit had fled, never to be resuscitated. This was in a measure fostered by the paternal rule of the Norwegian (and Danish) monarchs. Dependent on others for protection and support, apathy and indolence became the prominent features in the national character; agriculture and industry declined; and they gradually sank into their present indifference, from which there is no appearance of their ever emerging.

The modern history of Iceland, which may be said to date from this period, is uninteresting; and as their native land no longer produced men

or actions worthy of their literature, it expired from a want of themes on which their skalds could dilate.

At the close of the 12th century priestcraft held undisputed sway, and even their abject poverty did not exempt them from the pecuniary exactions of Rome: besides other tributes, the celebrated one called Peter's Pence was collected; and the sale of indulgences was carried on by native and foreign ecclesiastics. The preaching of the Crusades was also attempted in 1275-1289, but with little success. Many took up the cross, but purchased dispensation from bearing it to the Holy Land. The history of the 14th century is chiefly remarkable for being one of volcanic activity, an unusual accumulation of Greenland ice round the shores of the island, and many earthquakes.

In 1402 a plague swept through the land, probably the same epidemic which devastated Europe in the 14th century; it carried off nearly two-thirds of the whole population and was followed by such an inclement winter that nine-tenths of the cattle in the island died. Another pestilence succeeded; and their miseries were at this time heightened by the frequent incursions of English pirates; and the chroniclers of the times give a wretched picture of the remnant of their countrymen, physically and

morally prostrated into an abyss of apathy, ignorance, and superstition.

About this time a number of English fishermen frequented the coast, and we find Edward III. granting several privileges to the fishermen of Blocknie, in Norfolk, and exempting them from ordinary service, on account of their trade with Iceland. In 1419 twenty-five English fishing-vessels were wrecked in a heavy gale; and, in spite of the Althing and Danish government, who prohibited their frequenting the coasts, they established themselves by force at the Westmann Islands, and repelled every effort to dislodge them; in fact, were little better than pirates, plundering and burning on the main, and holding the wealthy inhabitants to ransom. In 1518 the English had so far persevered and succeeded that in Hafna Fiord alone they numbered three hundred and sixty, and from the complaints of Christian II. it appears that they had not abandoned the piratical habits of their predecessors.

That monarch was only prevented from pledging the island to the English community by the events which deprived him of his crown. Had he done so, it would, in all probability, have been a British possession at this day. In 1615 there were still one hundred and twenty British vessels employed in the fisheries.

The introduction of the printing-press, and the Reformation which shortly followed, imparted a more pleasing aspect to the 16th century. The first press was erected at Holum, in the northern province, and considerable activity was displayed in a number of publications.

Christian III., having established the Lutheran doctrine in his dominions, speedily extended it to Iceland, where, however, for a time, it met great opposition; but in 1558 it was generally accepted, and the monasteries, of which there were no less than nine, were abolished. In 1584 they published the Bible in their vernacular.

The 17th century was principally distinguished for the rapacity and brutality of the English, French, and Algerine pirates, who despoiled these unhappy people. A superstitious belief in witchcraft and sorcery increased to a surprising extent about this time, and was visited with great severity; numbers being burnt alive for practising these so-termed magic arts. The 18th century was ushered in by the small-pox, which carried off sixteen thousand of the inhabitants. In the middle of the century—severe winters following in rapid succession—vast numbers of cattle died, inducing a famine; that, again, swept away ten thousand inhabitants. In 1783, to crown their misery, an eruption of Skaptar Yökul took place,

the most tremendous in nature and extent which the world has witnessed within the memory of man: cattle, sheep, and horses perished; fish were driven from the coast; hunger, with its attendant diseases, swept the land; and the small-pox again made its appearance. These combined causes carried off a fourth of the remaining population, already reduced to some forty-five thousand.

In the beginning of the present century the last remnant of Icelandic nationality was swept away. The Althing, which for nearly 900 years had met at Thingvalla under the canopy of heaven, was abolished, and only restored since 1848; not on its old site, but in a Brummagem building in Reykjavik. Though its actual independence had long since passed away, it was a proud link with the past, a speaking memorial of a once-sturdy nationality; and its transformation must have been a quick-cutting severance for a people who are certainly better acquainted, as a mass, with their own history than any other community.

In 1809 an amphibious diplomatist in the form of a sea-captain of one of his Britannic Majesty's ships of war, having a difference with the Governor relative to trade, which he had been sent there to protect, seized him, and installed one Jorgensen, a Danish merchant, in his stead. This worthy proclaimed the

independence of the island, hoisting a blue flag, with three white stockfish thereon, as the national arms, and took a very indefinite view of the property of the inhabitants. Another man-of-war arrived; the usurper was made prisoner and sent to England, and the Governor ultimately restored. This produced an order in Council from the British Government, exempting the island from attack for the future, and proclaiming that the inhabitants of Greenland, Iceland, and the Faroes were to be considered as "stranger friends."

The government has undergone no material change in the present century, and, it is hardly necessary to remark, is still an appanage of the Danish crown, whose functions may be said to be limited to the appointment of the Governor, and the President and six—out of the twenty-six—members of the Althing; the meetings of which are now triennial. Within the last few years, trade, which was formerly confined to Danish ships, has been thrown open.

Such is a brief sketch of the colonization and history of this isolated country.

CHAPTER V.

TO THINGVALLA AND BACK.

Preparations — The start — Attack of the dogs on the mountain-sheep — Apathy of the drivers — Nature of the country — Skalbreide Yökul — Valley of Thingvalla — The Norsemen — The host's hut and homestead — Unfinished page of Icelandic history — In camp at Thingvalla — Return to Reykjavik.

August 5th.—OUR baggage started early this morning under the auspices of the French Consul, and from its amplitude a stranger would have imagined we were going to take up permanent quarters at Thingvalla, instead of only making a few days' stay on a shooting picnic. Of tents there were three, hammocks no end, and an entire "batterie de cuisine," together with prog and wine to support twelve hungry mortals for a fortnight. Our kind and considerate hosts have claimed to provide everything, and I certainly place every confidence in them, judging by their generous hospitality since my arrival: had they been my own countrymen, I could not have expected half so much; but my friend, in spite of his sharing my sentiments, insists on

slipping in an extra baggage-horse, with a ham of York, a cheese of Chester, and some other national productions, together with a few stray bottles, of which he vouches for the contents.

Precisely at eleven we move out of the Consul's yard, a most motley group, some thirteen in all, clad in every variety of jackboot and waterproof, for we know how treacherous is the climate. All are well mounted on their own ponies: here every one has plenty of them; no one thinks of even walking a mile. My own nag—a wall-eyed piebald—is diminutive, but none better to travel. They are impatient and want to be off—it is too much trouble to hold them; giving them their heads, we race off for the salmon river, distant three miles by track, which they do under the twenty minutes, and then settle down to their accustomed jog-trot. The route is ever ascending, and pretty direct towards the north-east, but uncommonly coarse. So long as we retain glimpses of the wild indented coast of Faxe Fiord the scenery is very enjoyable; but arriving amongst a group of irregular conical-shaped hills, it becomes monotonous in the extreme, and the track infernal—a Highland watercourse is a trifle in comparison. However, the ponies shuffle on in a surprising manner amongst the angular lava-blocks which are strewed in every direction:

all we have to do is to give them their heads, look out for our knees at the sharp turnings, and keep up a species of devil's tattoo on their flanks; without the latter they almost immediately stop. This tattoo is at first difficult to acquire, being contrary to all one's preconceived notions of horsemanship: it consists in a rectangular leg motion, and originates in the laudable desire of the native to keep his feet warm, which—as they are always wet, having no other defence than a pair of sheep or sealskin mocassins over a pair of stockings—is rather a difficult operation, and their lower extremities may be said to exist in a poultice of varied temperature.

All goes well, save that the high breeding of some sportive pointers belonging to the French officers is severely tested among the diminutive flocks of sheep in the neighbourhood of the scattered homesteads, which we pass from time to time, in sheltered nooks where a scanty pasture offers a precarious subsistence. Regardless of voice and whip, the dogs have a grand course in an extensive green valley we have opened up on our left, and a hard run they have, for these mountain muttons have both wind and speed; but distance tells, and dog has it: with the aid of glasses we see them refreshing themselves from their throats—a rather expensive draught for their masters—some five rix-

dollars. Here, to our dismay, in a deep gorge we come up with the baggage. It is now two o'clock, and they have not made half the journey: verily, we shall neither dine nor establish ourselves until midnight, and various are the revilings with which the baggage-master is bespattered. It is a goodly train of forty-two pony-power, all strung together, which unfortunately necessitates a universal halt every other moment; either a pack-box strikes against some projecting lava-nub, and displaces the load, or a gun-case slips off, or some of their rotten roping gear goes. All is thoroughly characteristic of the drivers, whose creed might be briefly embodied in the idea that everything was made to be destroyed: doubtless good for trade, but disagreeable when there are no means of replacing one's losses; and wrathy-riled I grew as I contemplated one of the upper joints of my salmon-rod chafed completely through. Utterly indifferent, these islanders seemed to think that the day was only made to be killed, and that their arrival at our destination was only second in importance to the state in which our traps might get there: many bottles of choicest growth have already yielded to their carelessness, but they don't even shrug their shoulders like an Italian, or indulge in the ofttimes unanswerable "come si fà."

At the end of this sullen-looking gorge, which we

have been following in the bed of a rapid stream, a steep and tortuous ascent brings us to an unbroken plateau, which stretches from hence to Thingvalla Lake and Valley, and, as it is about half way, we halt for lunch and to rest our ponies: the dogs likewise arrive, and are so liberally rewarded for their peccadilloes, that two, more discreet than the rest, put their tails between their legs, and start express for Reykjavik.

The country we have traversed has been capriciously bestrewed, in long-past periods of devastation, with alternating hills of lava, slag, and ashes; on the surfaces of which wind, water, and frost make annual havoc. In the intervening valleys the banks of the torrents are skirted with luxuriant morass, and the sides of the ranges are clad here and there with thin patches of grass; but for the most part they are bare and burnt, as if they had only yesterday emerged from the fiery ordeal. Huge blocks of lava, detached by atmospheric causes, strew the valleys and smaller hills, but have no connection with the glacial or boulder epoch; they consist simply of water-worn blocks of the adjacent formations, and, in some places, from their vicinity to craters, it is not at all impossible they may have been ejected.

In crossing the vast undulating waste which still

separates us from Thingvalla, our solitude is broken by the plaintive wail of thousands of golden plover, who scarcely deign to move out of our ponies' way: what they find to amuse or sustain them in this locality I cannot conceive, as a scant and stunted grass alone represents vegetation; if it is their escape from their enemy, man, they certainly have accomplished it, as we have traversed the entire distance, from fifteen to twenty miles, without even seeing the remnant of a cottage.

We have already caught copious glimpses of the Thingvalla water looking death-like in its lava-bound basin, fringed to the southward with lofty cones and craters, from whose flanks ascend spiral columns of steam, attesting still-heated surfaces.

The eastern shores of the lake are backed by lava-cliffs and promontories too varied in form to be photographed by pen, all merging into the huge sea of lava which has flowed from the district surrounding the now ice-clad Skalbreide Yökul.

Majestically crowning the head of the valley, this yökul looks like some whitewashed sinner, externally of spotless purity and symmetry, but at the same time the perpetrator of this matchless natural deformity, and capable of repeating it; for in bygone ages its uncontrollable energies cleft a passage for the molten stream through the loftier

ranges in its vicinity, and, subsequently diverging fan-like, formed the blistered field we are now traversing.

Scrambling over this excoriated surface, we suddenly halt on the verge of a precipice 180 feet high, and the far-famed valley of Thingvalla lies at our feet—a habitable space embosomed in that vast and ancient plain of lava which has poured forth from the Skalbreide district and filled up the intervening space between it and the lake. This valley or chasm has been formed by a more recent lava-stream from the yökul flowing over the surface of the ancient one, when the superincumbent weight, together with the agency of earthquake, acting upon the cellular, cavernous, and vapour-distended stratum beneath, occasioned a huge "slip," seven miles long and from five to three in breadth, on the surface of which time and nature have spread a feeble vegetation.

The valley is naturally deepest at its lower extremity in the neighbourhood of the Thingvalla water, whose adjacent margin has evidently been depressed, and in the depths of its clear waters the rents and fissures occasioned by the more recent catastrophe may be easily traced. The lake is the largest sheet of water in the island, and nearly thirty miles in circumference; its boundaries have undergone many changes, especially during the earth-

quakes of the past century, when its northern margin sank, whilst the opposite one was elevated. The depth is so great in places that a hundred-fathom line fails to reach the bottom, and it has two remarkable island-craters of diminutive size near the centre.

We are standing on the edge of the fracture in the ancient lava-bed, and looking down on the Thingvalla Valley. The rent yawning before us is called the Almannagiá: in it the divorced precipices grin at each other, in some places over a rich grass-carpet, in others over a mass of débris and ruin; the opposite face of the rent averaging some eighty feet beneath its original level.

Beyond this runs the Oxará. Having traversed the old lava-plateau, it bursts over the precipice in an unbroken sheet about a quarter of a mile further up, usurping the grassy bed of an old yökul river, and hastens to mingle the snow-waters of the adjacent mountains with those of the lake.

A few hundred yards off, near the mouth of the river, stand the parson's homestead and the church, the latter evidently undergoing heavy repairs; a skiff hauled up on the banks, and drying-nets speak for themselves. The reverend gentleman, assisted by the entire force of the establishment, is gathering in his hay crop from the green patches scattered on its banks.

On the opposite side of the valley the rugged out-line of the eastern fracture called the Hrafnagiá is most apparent, but nowhere is the severance so clean as at our feet. The intervening space is clothed with stunted birch-bushes, of an average height of four feet, here termed forest, dotted about amidst the frothy wavings of the invading lava-stream, which is for the most part covered with a soft cushion of mottled grey moss. Embedded in the centre stands a homestead, here dignified with the name of a farm, in the "tun" or hay-paddock of which we intend to establish ourselves: two other turf huts half-way up the valley, located on an equal number of half-acres of pasture, complete the agricultural interest; whilst on our side the wrinkled and naked surface of the broken-backed plateau is bisected with longitudinal rents and fissures. Across the river is the site of the Althing, which annually met here and legislated for good and for evil for nine centuries; a verdant section isolated on all sides by broad and deep chasms, save a narrow natural causeway on the south, and gradually ascending to a conical mound which forms its northern apex, the Law-Mount. Originally a farm confiscated to the state for the crimes of its proprietor, it was adopted by the republic as the seat of government.

Hallowed by their stern sense of right and wrong, even whilst idolaters, and consecrated by their acceptance of the faith, as well as their sturdy and successful efforts over a long series of years to preserve their independence, it was impossible to contemplate this natural monument of the indomitable pluck of this branch of the Norse section of our family without kindred feelings of pride at the early embodiment of that innate sense of independence which has placed our race in the vanguard of nations, as well as pity for their subsequent degradation and misfortunes.

Their kinsmen and relations for upwards of 300 years not only bore an important but a predominant part in the wars and legislation of England: settling on its broadest and best lands in such numbers that they swamped the original inhabitants, whose laws and customs they obliterated, introducing their own; eventually becoming the forefathers of as large a portion of our own nation as the Anglo-Saxons themselves, and of a much larger portion than the Norman element subsequently introduced.

The first instalment of these dauntless Norse marauders, who then roamed triumphant on every known sea, landed in England a thousand years since. The Anglo-Saxon inhabitants, enervated with four cen-

turies of monkery and superstition, and devoid alike of spirit or nationality, offered an easy conquest to their ever-increasing numbers. They eventually occupied and governed one-third of the country under their old Norse régime for many generations; and about a half-century previous to the "Conquest," when they were defeated by their own kinsmen, held, during four successive reigns,* the supreme government of the country.

Originally sprung from the same Teutonic stock, but retaining their barbarous energy, pagan vitality, and somewhat violent notions of representative freedom, they first made an easy conquest of, and then revivified, the priest-ridden and emasculated descendants of the old Anglo-Saxon race—infusing their wild Viking energy into the enslaved masses, and imparting that restless activity and those juster relations between the governing and the governed, which, though often imperilled by despotism and priestcraft, have been transmitted to us by our ancestors through many a fiery ordeal. For "all that men hope for of good government and future improvement in their physical and moral condition—all that civilized men enjoy at this day of civil, religious, and political liberty—representative legislature, the trial by jury, security of pro-

* Swein, Canute the Great, Harold Harefoot, and Hardicanute.—Normandy only conquered, not colonized, by Rolf Ganger, from whom William the Conqueror was fifth in descent.

perty, freedom of mind and person, the influence of public opinion over the conduct of public affairs, the Reformation, the liberty of the press, the spirit of the age—all that is or has been of value to man in modern times, as a member of society, either in Europe or in the New World, may be traced to the spark left burning upon our shores by these northern barbarians."*

As for that much-vaunted pre-eminence of the Anglo-Saxon race amongst the moderns, in intellect and in arms, which has passed into a stereotyped platitude with many of our countrymen—why, the English branch of that race was as socially and morally degenerate, and as devoid of spirit or nationality, as its present direct representatives, the Germans, are at this moment—until the irruption of the cognate branch of Norse into our island between the ninth and twelfth centuries; whose descendants, inheriting that precious Viking energy, have since sown the earth with colonies, as their sturdy Norse forefathers did every shore from the White Sea to the coast of Sicily, when, roaming over the Mediterranean, they plundered the seaboard of Spain and France, defied Charlemagne and crowned the Sicilian king, furnished for many years the body-guard of the Greek emperors at Constantinople, and, alike esteemed for their prowess and fidelity,

* Laing's 'Heimskringla.'

spread the fame of Norse arms in all surrounding countries.

Although they remained pagans for 500 years after every other country in Europe but their own had embraced Christianity, their national literature—ever a nation's breath—far surpassed in quantity and quality anything produced in either the Latin or Anglo-Saxon tongue during the same period, and it did not fail to give life and grasp to the national feeling; whilst their cotemporaries in England, employing a dead language, and that scantily, never reached the mass of their countrymen, or imparted cohesion to the national will—their monkish chronicles merely influencing a tribe of cloistered scholars. The Germans—who are the true, unmixed descendants of the original Anglo-Saxon race—have never for a moment enjoyed the rights of citizenship as understood by an American or an Englishman. And it is in vain that we search amongst them for any traces of those rational liberties we at present enjoy, which "are the legitimate offspring of the Things of the Norse, not of the Wittenagemot of the Anglo-Saxon — of the independent Norse Viking, not of the abject Saxon monk."*

Did this require further confirmation, we have only to compare the institutions of the United States,

* Laing's 'Heimskringla.'

of England and her colonies, with those of any European community claiming direct Teutonic descent, "to be satisfied that, from whatever quarter civil, religious, and political independence of mind, and freedom in social existence, may have come, it was not from the banks of the Rhine or the forests of Germany."

But it is time I joined my friends in the ravine; so, urging my surefooted piebald down the natural staircase, not many degrees out of the perpendicular, I found myself in the Almannagiá, or All-man's-land: but no man was there; an ominous raven croaked forth his undisputed possession. Pushing on, I forded the river just below the fall, and, crossing the sand-bank, which had formerly served as a place of execution, and making a happy cast on the right track amongst the lava, an hour's ride brings me to what I shall call home for the next few days.

The "tun," in all respectable farms, is carefully walled round with lava-blocks, offering a barrier three or four feet high to the cattle, horses, and sheep, who are expected to forage for themselves during the summer: in fact, the ponies, unless very old favourites,—their value here increases with their age, and no price will buy a twenty-year old,—are never fed in the severest winter, but are left to do the best they can for

themselves; consequently numbers die, and the remainder are so weakly in early spring, that it is not until the ground has been comparatively clear of snow for a month that they become fit for use. At first this seems cruel, but these wretched islanders have to trust almost entirely to their cows and ewes for subsistence during the winter, and can afford no hay for their ponies: indeed an indifferent hay season imperils their own existence.

The lane leading up to the front door is also walled, and mine host, scythe in hand, in his shirt and drawers, is at his front door bowing his welcome around, and endeavouring to make himself understood. Our baggage not being even in sight, let us explore his hut, which is a very good specimen of its sort. The entire front of this conglomeration of buildings is 43 feet in length, by about 25 or 30 in depth; in the centre is the dwelling-house proper; right and left, cowsheds, outhouses, smithy, &c.; the walls are two or three feet thick, a combination of turf and lava; the roof is boarded, and coated with a thick layer of turf, and consists of three gables, each surmounted with a weathercock. A long narrow passage with massive sides divides the dwelling, and leads straight into the kitchen, where a brisk fire of birch and peat is cooking the evening's "skier," under the auspices of a crone who

THE ICELANDIC HOME.

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is not at all calculated to increase one's appetite by her appearance; on either side are large irregular dwelling-rooms, in which there is a quaint mixture of scythes and saddles, dried cod's-heads, and the side of a colt (it tastes like veal); overhead, stores of moss and angelica gathered in the interior, coffee and sugar-candy, old clothes and spinning-jennies, fishing-nets and cradles (in one a litter of kittens, in another the hope of the family), strings of wet stockings, and dogs at every step; happily they bark, but do not bite. Couple this with a darkness thoroughly Egyptian, and an atmosphere which might be also cut with a knife, and you have the ground floor. Step up this ladder, and you are in the dormitory, running the whole length of the house; on either side are bunks, in which a single head and foot board separate nephew from grandmother, master from maidservant; old homespun coverlets, older clothes, and older sheepskins are heaped about promiscuously; I believe seaweed forms the mattresses, but I dare not look. The entire establishment sleep together, as well as any strangers who may happen to drop in, a thing of frequent occurrence, as the great northern and eastern routes here diverge; consequently two and three in a bed is the frequent order of the night. I should also mention that no air can enter save by the trap-hatch by which we

ascended: however, I daresay that makes it all the warmer in winter.

Opposite the house is a potato-garden, at the end of which is a spick-and-span new wooden shed, air and water tight, and floored: beneath is a species of cellar used as a dairy; it is divided into two rooms, and they have been well scoured out for our use. Here we grumpily await the arrival of our baggage, which does not turn up until past midnight: our old Crimean tent is then speedily on end, looking nearly as fresh as the day it was vended at Scutari by H. M. Commissariat at the advanced bid of ten shillings; a few hospital rugs from the same source, and a copious supply of hay, and we are soon enjoying what no riches can procure. All the more desirable, as to-night we must make a long journey, and arise in the year 1163.

AN UNFINISHED PAGE IN ICELANDIC HISTORY.

Thingvalla.—Since the removal of the National Assembly from the Hof,* in the Kiosar district, to the Lagbierget, or Law-mount,—on which we are now seated,—no gloomier day had broken in Icelandic annals than May-day in the year of our Lord 1163, in the seventh year of the Lagmannship of

* Temple.

the powerful Snorro Godi, when an unusually early spring had brought this national gathering together a few days before its accustomed time in the middle of the month. Although trial by ordeal, or duel, had been abolished by law, and holders of land were no longer permitted to challenge their neighbours to single combat for possession of their territory, in which first blood decided the owner's beggary or aggrandisement, the fruits of these evils were to be reaped. Great properties had become consolidated, and powerful chieftainships created; the governors of the four provinces into which the island was divided, together with their twelve prefects and the numerous local magistrates,—nearly all of which offices had now become hereditary,—brought their petty feuds to the annual meeting of the Althing, and were attended with troops of armed vassals and slaves, ready to do battle for their masters or enforce their will.

Apart from the legislative business,—to which all freemen had the right, and were in honour bound to attend, and by which they could alone hope to curb the increasing rapacity of their local judges, whose decisions were ofttimes annulled and reversed, and who were sometimes even arraigned before the Althing and deprived of their office,—this meeting assumed the character of a na-

tional gathering: wives and marriageable daughters accompanied their relatives from the most remote districts; betrothals generally took place at this period; and barter and general trade assumed the proportions of a national fair; even foreign merchants transplanted their stores from Reykjavik to exchange their European commodities for the wools of the North and East.

Nor were the clergy absent. Travelled, and more learned than their flocks—for many were educated on the continent, and some at Rome itself—headed by the Bishop of Skalholt, the priesthood, who were fast assuming power after the fashion of their southern brethren, swelled the pomp and ceremony of the meeting, and alternately flattered and cajoled the rival chieftains, thereby carrying out the order of their suffragan at Tronhjem to pave the way for the subjugation of the island by the Norwegian monarch. For since the morning when the first mass was performed on the banks of the river, by Thormond the priest of Gissur and Hialti, and the cross was finally exalted amid volcanic accompaniments,* Christianity was adopted in full assembly, and idols and temples alike destroyed; the entire population allowing themselves to be baptized, with the sole

* A violent eruption took place in the neighbourhood on this day.

stipulation that the water should be warm—a request easily complied with from the number of hot springs in the island: also the old Odinic oath, "So help me Freyr and Niordr, and that Almighty As,"* sworn on a silver ring dipped in the blood of a bull slain in sacrifice, to administer the law with equity, had been abolished, and cross and crozier were called in to sanctify their efforts instead, but with not nearly so righteous a result.

The mist had risen from the vale and revealed the numerous groups of booths pitched far and wide, where bigoted followers surrounded their chieftains, yet suffering from the debauch of the previous evening, when, listening to the recital of some thrilling saga, or to the poetic pæans and satires of rival skalds,† they drowned their feuds in mead, their favourite drink, for a thirsty lot were these old Icelanders.

The stirring adventures of Sigurd the Crusader, on the shores of the Mediterranean and in the Holy Land in the early part of the century, were still the favourite theme: how he defeated Spaniard and Moor, and graciously crowned Roger of Sicily; of his magnificent reception by Baldwin, who gave him a piece of the true cross, on which he swore to promote Christianity with all his power; and his piously

* The god Odin. † Poets.

bathing in the Jordan to cleanse him of his sins; how his horse was shod with gold when he made his princely entry into Constantinople; and of the sumptuous banquets and costly fêtes offered him by the Emperor Alexius: all which events were rendered intensely interesting by their being narrated by Halldor Skualldre, who accompanied that monarch as Sagaman, and had now returned laden with honours and years, like a true Icelander, to lay his bones in his island-home. Then there were the lampoons against Harald Gormonson, the King of Denmark, who had plundered an Icelandic vessel stranded on his coasts, for which the Althing passed a law that there should be as many lampoons written against him as there were headlands in his country. In strange contrast to all this revelry, a woman, yesterday condemned by a jury of her countrymen for infanticide, is stolidly awaiting her barbarous fate in the pool beneath the fall; and on the island hard by in the river, where male culprits are beheaded, those recovered from their cups have already commenced horse-fighting; whilst groups of stalwart wrestlers are wrangling on the banks respecting their triumphs in previous struggles. Higher up the vale, horse-racing, of which they were passionately fond, took place, and heavy sums were lost and won; indeed the sagas tell us, among many instances, of a noble

patron of the turf named Orn, who was so affected when his favourite mare was completely distanced by Fluga (Highflier), that immediately after he had made away with his money he made away with himself.

Bowls, quoits, and swimming were likewise among their favourite pastimes, and also the subject of heavy betting.

As the day advances, a bell from the Law-mount summons the representatives to prayer and to listen to the reading of the Ufliotian code * by the Lagmann, which he formerly recited from memory. The armed representatives throng in; the "Hreppstiorar," or local magistrates, having, after the Church, the place of honour: elected by their countrymen, the law required that they should be men of known wisdom and integrity, and also in possession of a certain amount of fixed property, whereas, as I have already said, the office had now become almost hereditary in the more potent families. Next come the free-holders of the island, all of whom have a right to speak. The limited surface of the Althing is soon crowded, and by far the greater portion seat them-

* The inhabitants, experiencing great inconvenience from the want of a universal code of law, with great sagacity sent Ufliot (A.D. 925), a chieftain of great wisdom and integrity, to study the Norwegian code for three years, and subsequently deputed him to frame their own.

selves on the surrounding crags and cliffs, only separated from their companions by the yawning fissure in the surface—fifteen feet wide, sixty deep, with a fathomless moat at the bottom. There is hardly any difference of dress in the assembled multitude: a plain, straight-cut, brown frieze jacket, and loose trousers of the same material confined by a waist-belt; amongst the chiefs the latter, as well as their buttons, is generally of silver, the clasp being a rude representation of the Holy Family; their shields and arms are likewise inlaid with the same metal. Snorro wears a massive gold necklet, and other valuable ornaments, presents from the Norwegian king, in hopes of inducing him to barter his country's liberties; and he is surrounded by the hereditary governors of provinces and prefectures, each of whom is omnipotent in his own district. The "Lagmann" was chosen from among this aristocratic element—nominally for his virtues, in reality for his power. His duty was to preside at the assembly, conduct its councils, regulate its decisions, and interpret the law. His authority was solely dependent on his tenure of office, which depended on the will of the assembly, and was usually continued for many years—very often for life. All are bareheaded and unshaved, and have not yet lost the thew and sinew of their ancestors by famine or pestilence.

The statutes of the poor-laws now come under supervision. Culpable paupers were deprived of the right of citizenship, and excluded from the assembly; their children were likewise debarred from inheriting property until they had gained their food for three years by honest labour; the public were forbidden to administer relief—that duty the State assumed, at the same time punishing the recipients so severely that death sometimes ensued; but any one was free to qualify a vagabond for service in a seraglio.

Numerous lawsuits had to be settled, for these Icelanders were well up in legal chicanery—a man acquiring as much reputation for defeating his adversary in a lawsuit as for killing him in a duel; and the influential soon found they could crush their adversary more effectually, and with less bodily risk, by the underhand practices of the law, than by meeting him with sword and battle-axe at a "holmgang."* Jurisprudence consequently became the favourite study of the rich, who were always ambitious to plead before the Althing, and display their power of legal quibble and their skill in ruining their adversaries by interminable lawsuits.

The Grágás, as their written code was subsequently

* Duel: so called because it generally took place on an uninhabited island.

termed, was divided into ten sections: the first two relating to the political division and administration of the country.; the 3rd contained 72 chapters concerning judiciary proceedings; the 4th, 25 on the inheritance of property; the 5th, 35 on the poor-laws; the 6th, 59 relative to marriage, divorce, conjugal rights, &c.; the 7th, 85 on commercial law; the 8th, 121 on criminal law; the 9th, 72 on property; the 10th, 4 on navigation. One remarkable characteristic distinguished the whole—namely, that nearly all punishments could be evaded by the payment of a fixed fine; poverty being even a greater crime then than at the present moment.

The legal rate of interest was ten per cent., and insolvent debtors were mildly treated—a great improvement on the Norwegian system, where the creditor was entitled to summon his debtor before the local "Thing," when, in default of payment, he might, Shylock-like, take it out in flesh, and "hew off any part of his body, either above or below," as he might think proper—in fact, the wretched debtor might be cut to pieces.

The game-laws received due consideration, no one being allowed to fish or kill game anywhere but on his own estate.

Those who had killed highway robbers likewise received the prescribed recompence.

Gentlemen sometimes exchanged estate, live-stock, and wife. If the latter disapproved of the proceeding, the law-courts were available, and, as the statutes were all in favour of the ladies, they never failed to have their own way. Their property being, in all cases, secured to them, they often obtained a divorce on very trifling grounds—such as convicting their husband of wearing a shift, or any article of female apparel; in fact, the wife had only to tell her husband that they had ceased to be man and wife, and the marriage was dissolved. The ladies then usually turned a trifle gay, set up hostelries on their own account, where they entertained their friends gratis, until one more favoured than the rest was accepted as a husband.

Women were further protected by the most stringent anti-kissing laws: any one kissing anybody, with or without the lady's consent, save his own lawful wife, was liable to a fine of 144 ells of wadmal* per kiss—enough, as M. Mallet quaintly remarks, to furnish a ship's company with monkey-jackets. The love-ditties of amorous or brokenhearted swains might likewise be prosecuted, and the perpetrators severely fined for the benefit of the hard-hearted young lady; but, for the honour of the Icelandic fair sex, let it be recorded that this was not often resorted

* Homespun cloth.

to. And when it is added that no man was permitted to take unto himself a wife, unless he was possessed of a certain amount of property—viz. 720 ells of wadmal, or its equivalent—and the ladies were permitted to ride astride, not even a Bloomer could complain of their condition.

Divorce, which was usually effected by the wife expressing her wish, according to form, before witnesses, had likewise, in special cases, to be attended to —for instance, as in appeals from the local courts: for blows or harsh words it was common; therefore was polygamy rare, though every perfect gentleman had his "frillas," or supernumerary wives—ofttimes the cause of great contest, as in the present instance:— Halldor, the Lagmann's son, has debauched the favourite concubine of Olaf Oddeson, and subsequently slain him in the most approved manner. His son Thorgils, having buried his parent, and celebrated the event with due solemnity by entertaining 700 friends for a fortnight—thereby ruining himself—enters and interrupts the harmony of the sitting by removing, with one blow, Halldor to, let us hope, a better world: for this he will either have to fight the next of kin, pay a compensatory fine, or stand the consequences of an action at law; the result of the latter being about as uncertain as a similar proceeding in our own country; but being handy with his

axe, he will, in all probability, choose a "holm-gang."

Hitherto the Althing had been free from blood: this tragedy, however, paved the way for many similar exhibitions; and that respect for constituted authority, which had rendered their deliberations so remarkable in an age of violence, never returned; this honoured sward becoming the cockpit of rival factions, whose bloody feuds rendered the island an easy prey to Hakon of Norway.

Thingvalla Camp, Aug. 10*th.*—Here we spent five joyous days, weather beaming, and the heavens without a cloud by day or night: so mild and calm is it, after the tempestuous and juicy days which have prevailed since my arrival, and indeed throughout this unusually fitful summer, that one would almost fancy we had been transplanted by some fairy hand to the neighbourhood of Mona Roa, did not the absence of that ever-luxuriant vegetation which steals into the very margin of that crater—to say nought of the glittering blue yökul at the head of the vale—dispel the illusion. Our programme was, to let those who please shoot before breakfast; they were not many generally; but as I could not lie in bed under the circumstances, I became in spite of myself an early riser, and, taking my gun, wandered down to the banks of the lake, to investigate the nets, which

were always full of that most delicate and delicious of trout styled by Gaimard "les truites des fontaines." They are only found in the larger lakes, in which there are cold springs; externally and internally they are of a brilliant orange, and, boiled in a butter sauce prepared by M. Vérons' chef, they certainly surpass anything I have ever met that has its home in the waters, whether salt or fresh; and were they only known at Petersburgh, would not fail to be brought down by steamer in ice, and add one more to the far-sought luxuries of that most luxurious of capitals; fresh sterlet from the Volga by "paderoshnie" must cost fifty times the price which these trout could be brought down for, and are not half so good. These fish in a demi-torpid state meander in shoals round the numerous icy-cold fountains which bubble up through the fissures of the lava round the margin of the lake; what they thrive on I cannot tell, as they steadfastly declined every fly and bait I could devise. Picking up a few snipe and duck by the way, and returning about noon, we find breakfast spread on nature's carpet in front of our tents; the only native production tolerated is the aforesaid trout, which holds the place of honour, and, together with the Sauterne, would alone have rewarded a trip to this outlandish spot. Subsequently, taking our ease and the never-failing pipe, we arrange the day; some explore the Althing,

others the caverns en route to Geyser, or make an expedition per boat to the craters of Videy and Sandey; inveterate sportsmen mount their ponies, and seek ptarmigan, plover, and curlew amongst the moss-covered lava-streams. In the evening we display our spoils, and dine at eight, if possible more sumptuously than we have breakfasted; then, banishing politics, admit Folly with the Sillery, and she reigns supreme on these starlit nights in chat and song, till the last refrain of the "pomponette" dies away in the small hours. Such, with little variation, save in trips, has been our daily life. This afternoon we were joined by the French consul's wife and daughters from town, and to-morrow, with a goodly bag of some 600 head of snipe, ptarmigan, duck, plover, &c., we hope to return to Reykjavik.

CHAPTER VI.

TO KRISUVIK AND BACK.

Start for Krisuvik — Object of the journey — Hafna Fiord — Picture of erratic ruin — Rough travelling — Route to the mines — Absence of animal life — The sulphur-banks — The Krabla mud-caldron — Importance of the possession of the sulphur-banks — Title purchased by an Englishman — Produce might undersell that of Sicily.

Reykjavik, August 12th.—LAST night, on our arrival from Thingvalla, we immediately despatched our baggage for Krisuvik, the great sulphur district of the south, distant some thirty miles, over the meanest road in the country: my object is to examine the extensive sulphur-mines belonging to my friend, who had erected an iron house in the vicinity of the principal one, about a mile from a village of that name. Well mounted in company with the governor and my friend, we determined to do under five hours the usual journey of nine: indeed the governor could, I believe, have done it under four, though no light weight — his own pony, of thirteen hands, being about the fastest pacer in the island, of great power

and endurance, and wonderfully clever, making but little difference in speed on the worst lava-tracks or level ground. Such is the force of habit, even with the horse: a specimen brought from any other part of the world would, I believe, have knocked itself to pieces in half an hour. It being low water, we were enabled to cut off many deep creeks which run up amongst the lava-fields, and, leaving the Ness to our right, we struggled through a sea of lava, where the waves had been mountains high, until we stumbled abruptly on the village of Hafna Fiord, snugly ensconced in the bosom of the crooks and crannies of this once molten sea. Lying at the head of a very snug bay, it is a great fishing depôt, and has several tidy Danish houses and stores, looking clean and homely, unpolluted with that seaport-civilization air which pervades Reykjavik. The population, with the above exceptions, consists wholly of native cod-catchers, who often earn ten rix-dollars a day in the season; they seem well to do, and, though their huts are small, their boats are roomy. The anchorage is snug, and there is a natural tidal harbour, formed by a capricious twirl in the lava-stream, where a small vessel might be safely beached and repaired. A small iron house belonging to my friend contrasts strangely with the surrounding turf huts: in it are twenty tons of flour of sulphur, which have been

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shovelled up from the crust of one of the suffiones of Krisuvik—it is going to Europe as a specimen of the mineral wealth of the far North.

A short ten minutes' rest, and we are ascending the slag ridge which lies on the western shores of the fiord; and from its crest a picture of erratic ruin bursts upon the eye, unsurpassed even in this desolate isle. The entire district looks as if it had been baked, broiled, burnt, and boiled by some devilish hand, until its chemical soul had fled, and left nought behind save a grim, grey shroud of darkness and despair.

Away towards Reykianæs, interminable hoary lava-streams, amongst the oldest in the island, form the promontory; the ocean receiving their extremities, which extend far away beneath its bosom on the submarine spine connecting the reefs and islets that from time to time have been elevated and submerged at the extremity of the volcanic line. Ahead, the sullen, sombre ash-cones and craters of the black mountain ranges around Krisuvik meet the inky, angry-looking clouds with which the horizon is overcast; whilst sweeping over this congealed Pandemonium comes an Atlantic gale, driving a tropical deluge before it, dispelling in a measure the natural feeling of loneliness in this awe-inspiring solitude, more like some worn-out hell, which the brush of

J. B. Godfrey

SCENE ON THE ROAD TO KRISUVIK.

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a Martin had created, or Shelley had imagined, than the home of man in any phase of his earthly pilgrimage.

On, on we go, our Cordings and boots sorely tried with wind and rain; but it beats on our backs, and makes us go the faster: to face it would be simply impossible. Nothing breaks the monotony of the track: sometimes we are crossing frothy, and at other times cavernous lava; the latter dangerous, especially at our present speed, for the rents and fissures in the crowns of the domes reveal the vapour-distended caverns below—the roof varying from a foot or two to a few inches in thickness. As for the road, it was simply like battering along on the domes of a succession of cast-iron ovens; in some places more rideable than in others from the wrinkled and ropy surface they presented, but always both slippery and tortuous. Our clever little ponies never swerved nor stumbled; their progress was perfectly miraculous: indeed I should have proclaimed it utterly impossible, and the attempt fatuous, had I not seen and followed our steady leader the Governor, for to have been thrown once would have sufficed for the day, as each point, or surface, was hard as iron. Two hours of this maniac ride brought us to a less dangerous road, strewed with ashes and sand: here, the deluge for a

moment ceasing, we gave our horses a quarter of an hour, and listened to more than one account of peasants being lost in the snow on this dangerous track during the winter months. The route now led amongst old worn-out craters and cinder-heaps, the valleys being one mass of excessively fine black sand, and subsequently emerged on the edge of the lava-field, which we skirted under the face of the spine of the principal ridge. Here and there faint indications of sulphur-earth manifested themselves on the sides of the hills, in pale, citron-coloured clay patches, where frost or rain had removed the outer coating. Another hour's ride brought us to the pass which crosses to the principal mines, and a steep ascent it was, greasy, yet sticky; in some places across clay, in others over ashes and slag; and we eventually opened up a gorge in the centre of the ridge, with a lake occupying the bed of an extensive extinct crater. Giving it a wide berth—for, whenever we approached, the horses sank knee-deep in the mud—and crossing the opposite ridge, we had the valley of Krisuvik at our feet; on the left lay the extensive lake of Kleiservatn; and in all parts of this swampy valley, as well as the face of the hill, rose jets of steam and smoke. Three or four foaming, spluttering, slaty-blue mud-caldrons were boiling away at the foot of the hill, on the face of

which saffron-coloured masses of flour of sulphur were scattered on the many-hued clay banks of which the entire range is constituted; and wreaths of pale vapour ascended from every gorge. Farther to the right lies a fathomless lake of blue, rivalling Capri; yonder is the village, backed by the sea, distant four or five miles; opposite are ominous-looking spurs of the mountain chain which stretches south from Thingvalla. No bird or beast frequents this lifeless range, but near the mud-caldrons in the valley the grass seemed most luxuriant, and cattle grazed on their brinks, though the sulphureous stench under their lee was overwhelming. The descent was very difficult, and we were obliged to dismount, for to have slid over the face of the hill into a hot-bed of sulphur and mud was not at all impossible. Halfway down we passed what at first in the thick mist seemed like a Runic inscription, but it turned out to be the name of some Briton, carved in letters a foot in height on the face of an isolated rock. Where do we not find evidences of this national weakness? The Parthenon and caves of Elephanta, the Porcelain Tower and the Pyramids, are alike defiled. Twisting round an elbow in this range, we found ourselves under the principal mine, and at the door of my friend's iron house, which he has put up for the agent, and a hut for the workmen. We, and fatigued with our hard

ride, we clustered round the peat fire, eat our dinner without much state, and left the sulphury regions to simmer till the morning.

KRISUVIK SULPHUR-BANKS.

August 13th.—Before we ascend the hill, to inspect the sulphur-banks, it will not be inopportune to take a glance at the intimate relation existing between the fumeroles, thermal waters, and other active volcanic agencies, which intersect the island in a parallel system of longitudinal lines from its north-eastern to its south-western extremities, and pass over mountain and valley, as in the sulphur districts around Krisuvik and Krabla, merely exhibiting different expressions of the same fundamental cause.

The geological aspect of this volcanic system is distinguished by the vast palagonite mountain ranges of which it is formed, and they constitute the basis of thermal phenomena in Iceland.

In the sulphur districts, volcanic and aqueous gases, especially sulphuric, bursting upwards, decompose the palagonite, and convert it into masses of ferruginous and fumerole clay of various hues. These sulphureous gases, on meeting the atmosphere, are decomposed, and the sulphur precipitated in banks

varying in thickness and purity according to their age and position.

Where the sulphuric gases are almost if not wholly absent, the thermal and geyser systems are developed in their stead, from combinations which I will enter into on the spot.

Steam was jetting from all parts of the face of the mountain, especially from a saddle about 300 feet overhead, which lay parallel to the range, and seemed to be the centre of sublimation of a mass of pure sulphur.

We found the ascent both greasy and arduous, over the soft beds of white, red, and blue clays; the former containing from thirty to forty per cent. of sulphur, and the two latter, which form the lower and more extensive portion, about sixteen per cent. As we advanced we were obliged to make a long détour to avoid the sulphureous column of vapour swept down by the wind from this main centre of sublimation, and the stench was intolerable. The crust became hotter and hotter, and the clays lighter, and at every step we displaced whole barrowfuls in our struggle for a footing; vapour breaking out of the exposed surface, which was much too warm to bear the hand upon. Ultimately we arrived at the weather side of the bank, and found it of considerable extent, covered with a crust, two

to three feet in depth, of almost pure sulphur, for, in specimens we selected at random, only $\frac{4}{100}$ parts of foreign matter could be found.

In the valley beyond, about fifty feet beneath us lay a huge caldron twelve feet in diameter in full blast, brimming and seething with boiling blue mud, that spluttered up in occasional jets five or six feet in height, diffusing clouds of vapour in every direction. If a constant calm prevailed here, instead of ever-varying gales, the sulphur sublimated from these sources would be precipitated in regular banks; as it is, it hardly ever falls twenty-four hours in the same direction, the wind blowing it hither and thither, capriciously distributing the sulphur-shower in every quarter.

What between the roaring of the caldron, the hissing of the steam jets, the stink of the sulphur, the clouds of vapour, the luridness of the atmosphere, the wildness of the glen, and the heat of the soil increasing tangibly at every inch, I could not help occasionally glancing round to assure myself that his Satanic Majesty was not present, and nestled up to my companions, to be ready in case of any such emergency as "Pull, devil; pull, Governor" arising.

Such, with little variation save in locality, were the numerous soufrières and solfataras that we visited,

and they extend over a space of twenty-five miles in length. The riches of the district consist not so much in these numerous crusts of almost pure sulphur, as in the beds of what I must be permitted to term sulphur-earth, which are promiscuously scattered in all directions, averaging from six inches to three feet in thickness, and containing from fifty to sixty per cent. of pure sulphur, the creation of extinct sublimatory sources in ages past.

In the north the sulphur is found in great quantities in the more extended districts round Myvatn and Husavik, but it is far less pure, and not so easy of access; though in the past century a considerable amount was exported from those sources. The mud-caldron of Krabla, situated amongst a range near the Myvatn, is however well worthy of notice, and hardly inferior as a natural phenomenon to the great Geyser: its basin, literally a lake of boiling mud, is 300 feet in circumference, with numerous jets scattered about on its surface; the central one, about ten feet in diameter, erupts every five or six minutes, and attains an altitude varying from twelve to thirty feet. That caldron, it is needless to observe, is one vast suffione.

Apart from the natural phenomena of these districts, one cannot help wondering that Danish enterprise has never developed what M. Robert, in

Gaimard's work,* most justly terms a mine of wealth, and which must be done when the Sicilian supply is consumed—at least, at present, we know of no other mines to take their place, unless it be the very remote ones recently discovered in Japan. M. Robert also adds that they ought never to be allowed to fall into the hands of Great Britain, on account of their importance in time of war. But this, I am happy to say, has taken place within the last few years—the entire southern district being purchased by an Englishman, Mr. Bushby, who likewise holds the refusal of that in the north.

* 'Voyage en Islande et en Gröenland, sur la corvette "La Recherche," Minéralogie et Géologie,' par Eugène Robert.—Gaimard's Work.

1st Part, page 274. "Le soufre se trouve aussi à Námufiall (in the north of Iceland) dans les circonstances géologiques analogues à celles de Krisuvik. On l'y rencontre généralement concrétionné d'un jaune citron, en masses pures, quelquefois assez considérables, et ordinairement associé à de la chaux et à de la silice.

"Il est à regretter que le Gouvernement Danois ne favorise pas cette industrie, qui fournirait à la métropole d'aussi beau soufre, et sans doute à meilleur marché que celui des sulfatures de la Sicile. Du reste, le Danemark possède là en Islande d'immenses soufrières, qui un jour seront pour lui d'une grande richesse, quand celles de la Sicile seront épuisées; aussi doit-il bien se garder de jamais accorder aux Anglais, qui l'ont sollicitée, la faculté d'exploiter ces soufrières, comme on l'a fait en Laponie à l'égard des mines de cuivre."

Page 276. "La montagne de Krabla est, comme celle de Námufiall, une immense soufrière."

Page 210. "La première localité, celle de Krisuvik, ne diffère réellement de la seconde que par la grande quantité de soufre qui s'y forme."

That gentleman visited the island in '57, in H.M.S. "Snake," and explored the principal portion of it. Much struck with the dormant wealth of the sulphur districts, and their value to England in the event of the Sicilian supply being cut off during war, after considerable trouble he induced the peasant-proprietors to part with their titles.

Although the Danish Government wisely and liberally offers every facility and encouragement to foreigners to embark in the various branches of industry which the island affords, such was the tenacity with which the peasant-owners clung to the titles of the sulphur districts that European capital has until lately been prevented from stepping in, the original owners being content to collect and export, from time to time, a quantity sufficient to barter for their immediate domestic wants.

To develop the Krisuvik mines, capital would doubtless be required, as the track to the port of Grundevik, on the southern coast, would have to be improved for the transit of the sulphur on baggage-ponies; or if this, the nearest route, were not adopted, it must be conveyed in barges down the Kleisavatn Lake, which stretches from the feet of these hills to within seven or eight miles of Havna Fiord, a direction favourable for a track by the banks of the

Kaldá river,* thereby avoiding the almost impassable lava district we crossed yesterday, across which twenty tons of sulphur we saw at Havna Fiord were this summer transported, to the ruin of forty or fifty ponies.

Judging by the trifling cost of production, and moderate freight home—the numerous vessels coming from England with salt returning in ballast—sulphur gathered from these sources would be able to undersell the Sicilian market by almost a half.

* This remarkable river is well worthy of notice; a number of springs which empty themselves into an extensive basin at the head of a ravine form at once a considerable stream, which, after an impetuous run of a short two miles, entirely disappears beneath the lava-field.

CHAPTER VII.

JOURNEY TO BORGAR FIORD.

Good salmon-fishery — Embark for Borgar Fiord — Endless adieux — Pilot ignorant of the route — A night at Leira — The Sysselman of Borgar — Rough journeying — Foam-storms by sea, whirlwinds on land — The valley of the Huitá — Pyramidal mountain — Salmon-curing — Journey to Reykholt — Nature-cooking — Alternating fountains — Natural steam-pump — Midriver geyser — Memoir of Snorro Sturleson — Snorro's Bath — His 'Heimskringla,' or Chronicle — His singular death — Comfortable fishing quarters.

Reykjavik, Aug. 16th.—YESTERDAY at the Salmon River, in two hours, I landed three fine grilse and fourteen large and vigorous sea-trout, from that portion, scarcely 300 yards in length, intervening between its mouth and the boxes; and on my return in the evening I saw my friends in the "Artemise," topsails down, in the horizon, under Snæfells Yökul, on their way to the northern shores of the island to look after their fishermen. My occupation having comparatively departed with them, I hired a large boat to carry me across the bay to Borgar Fiord, famous for its salmon rivers; intending to take a week's fishing there, and from thence prosecute my journey by Snæfells Yökul, which I hoped to ascend,

investigate the valley of Reykholt and its thermal waters, the caves of Surtshellir, and then across country to Geyser and Hekla, returning by Little Geyser and the southern coast in time for the sailing of the steamer in the middle of September. This journey I was unfortunately compelled to undertake alone, my friend being too unwell to accompany me; but he gave me great assistance in selecting and preparing the numerous things requisite for such a lengthened trip, which he was well qualified to do as an old Icelandic traveller. My reason for starting for Borgar in a boat was, that I hoped to save a day, as it is only forty miles by water and a good hundred by land. But I was grievously disappointed, and strongly recommend any future wanderer in these parts never to set foot in a native boat—always stick to the ponies, if it takes thrice the amount of time, especially if you have the faintest regard for your life. I had indulged in the vain hope of an early start, but it was near noon before I could get away, so eternal were the adieux and endless the libations of these degenerate descendants of the sturdy Norse: though it is but fair to say that, away from the town, many of their homely virtues yet exist, and prayer is often substituted for brandy in their aquatic excursions. At last, by dint of threat and persuasion, we start with a favouring gale. Our boat is large

and fairly shaped, but heavy and lifeless, like the boatmen, though not from the same cause: they are all enveloped in sealskin from head to foot, and staggering with snuff and brandy. Running alongside a Scotch schooner that came in yesterday for a cargo of ponies (and with the supercargo of which my boatmen had coolly formed another engagement), we finally started, with that drunken addition of my countrymen and a boatload of horse-gear. The supercargo was going to buy ponies at Borgar, for the breed there is justly esteemed as the best in the island.

Scudding before the fresh gale, we ran past the basaltic island of Videy, famed as a favourite home of the eider-duck, and were soon at Cape Akranes, where, to my astonishment, the boatmen persisted in landing and horsing me on. Naturally disgusted, as two hours more would have run us into Borgar Fiord, and we were by land scarcely an hour nearer than at starting, I remonstrated, when the head-man coolly informed me he did not know the way; and, as there were many rocks and shoals at the entrance, perhaps it was just as well that he landed us where he did. After an hour's delay we all started for Leira, a farm about half-way, where it was necessary to pass the night. Traversing a succession of extensive and dangerous morasses, which here intervene between the barren

precipices of the Esian range and the sea, and at the foot of which are the earthy foundations of the ancient "hof," or district temple, we were joined by the Sysselman of Borgar, returning to his syssel, or district. His duties and position are somewhat analogous to the old hereditary magistrate—administering justice and collecting taxes in his districts: these officers are now appointed by the crown, and are generally chosen from amongst the most respectable landowners. The gentleman in question was thoroughly well-informed, and married to a Danish lady, and one of the best specimens of the Icelander I had the pleasure of meeting. Under his guidance we reached early in the evening the débris-formed plain of Leira, lying under the Borgar range, which we shall cross to-morrow. Another two hours' riding and swimming—for we had to cross an arm or two of the sea, where our ponies were sometimes out of their depth—brought us to our destination. It is a large farm, situated in the middle of the plain, and famous for good ponies and sheep. The proprietor was hospitable, though somewhat antique, and lived in the patriarchal style—rumour said he had a hundred children.

August 17th.—In the morning I found the bæar (farm) surrounded with troops of half-wild ponies, which had been collected far and wide for the inspection of the north country dealer, who dismissed them

with a wave of his hand, and told them, if they had nothing better to show, they had better not come to his market at Borgar; he evidently knew his craft, but, from subsequent report, I fancy he met his match, for that peculiarity which is supposed to flourish north of the Tweed is not wholly wanting amongst Icelanders, who would sooner leave their ponies to perish in the winter than abate one iota of the price they demand.

Under the guidance of the old farmer I managed to get away from Borgar at ten o'clock, and a rough wintery day it was, foam-storms by sea, and whirlwinds by land; near the shores these spiral columns of dust and water were coquetting and pirouetting, advancing and retreating, until they were gradually dissipated in the various eddies which circled down from the adjacent ranges. Our track lay across a plain through numerous small rivers to the foot of the mountain-pass we had to cross: composed entirely of débris, it bore numerous glacial evidences, but no moraines properly speaking: rain had also wrought great changes in its surface, as indeed it does throughout the country. An hour and a half's ride brought us to the foot of the range and mouth of the pass, a gradual ascent of rather more than 2000 feet. In this vast chain, which stretches far away to the north-east, and divides the Syssel, earthquake and fire have

done their work earnestly, and old and modern formations are heaped about in wild confusion and profound degradation. On our left we passed many traces of sulphur; and to the right, irregular ranges of horizontal trap terraces, which had been driven up through the tufaceous masses: snow still lay scattered on their summits, and many a foaming torrent fell over the cliffs.

No sooner had we ceased to ascend than we opened up the extensive and magnificent view of the valley of the Huitá or White River, with its numerous tributary streams rushing down from the surrounding mountain chains and the distant and invisible Eyriks Yökul and adjacent lake district; the river imbibes its milk-white hue from the detritus of the volcanic districts it traverses, and eventually mingles with the arm of the sea called Borgar Fiord in a very deep and rapid stream half a mile in width. The fiord itself is dotted with numerous basaltic-looking islets, the offspring of earthquakes, and frequented for breeding by numbers of eider-ducks. On the opposite bank of the river is Myrè or Bog Syssel, receiving its name from those extensive and luxuriant green marshes which stretch up to the base of that wild and tormented range that forms the background of the picture. Standing out in bold relief from the dark adjacent trap mountains, is the glittering

white trachyte cone of Baula, 3000 feet in height, the theme of many a legend and superstition. In the intervening plain are scattered numerous farms; cattle and sheep abound in the rich meadows; hay-making is in full swing in all directions; and the whole valley comprises a panorama of rural industry for which I was entirely unprepared.

As we descend, our path is rich in crystals and felspar, zeolites and a species of coarse opal; from time to time we obtain glimpses of an extensive lake embedded amidst the mountains towards the north—its waters are intensely blue; and when about halfway down, we find ourselves at the foot of a most remarkable four-sided pyramidal mountain called Honn, to which the Egyptian pyramids are mere pigmies in comparison, and not more regularly constructed. It is composed of regular superimposed beds of trap, gradually diminishing to a point, and forming the steps as it were of four colossal stair-cases, each one of which is perfectly symmetrical, and looks much more like the handiwork of some bygone race of giants than a freak of nature; the almost mechanical neatness of this natural pyramid contrasting strangely with the ruthless destruction which surrounds it. On gaining the plain we were obliged to obtain a local guide to traverse the twelve miles of treacherous morass which intervened between

us and our destination on the banks of the river. Here for the first time in my life I saw haymaking carried on under water: the mowers were well over their ankles, whilst the women collected the grass and loaded the ponies, who conveyed it to the higher ground to dry. In spite of all precautions, we were very often nearly bogged; the numerous watercourses creating incessant changes in this deceitful surface, which, quaking with our weight, often immersed the ponies to their bellies, and forced us to dismount. These animals accepted their position with a stolidity worthy of a better cause; if left to themselves under such circumstances, they merely cropped the surrounding grass, and made no effort to get out until they had consumed all the herbage within reach, when they floundered on in quest of more.

Early evening brought us to a large establishment belonging to Messrs. Ritchie of Peterhead, where nine Scotchmen were employed in preserving in tins the salmon collected by the Icelanders from the adjacent rivers; for the fish desert the muddy yökul stream as soon as possible for the clearer branches which pour down from the lakes or drain the valleys. This year they had had a bad season, the fish taking off suddenly and early, and they had only secured about 20,000 lbs. weight, 30,000 lbs. being the usual average. Could our

fishers purchase the right of fishing for themselves, three or four times that amount might be easily taken without detriment to the supply; but there are so many proprietors along the banks, with whom it is necessary, and at the same time difficult, to come to an understanding, that the only thing to be done is to let them take the fish in their primitive manner under piers which they build out in the stream, and then purchase at the average price of about three pence a pound. Several similar establishments exist on the various large salmon-rivers, and one in the north has just been purchased by the enterprising owners of our steamer, from which even the Icelanders annually export 50,000 lbs. weight of kippered fish to Denmark; so the supply in this island may be almost said to be inexhaustible. Some dozen fish, brought on ponies from the head of the northern branch, were lying in a tub preparatory to curing, the largest weighing twenty-one pounds: it was considered a very fine one, their average weight running low in the southern rivers, whereas in the north a fish of thirty or forty pounds weight is by no means uncommon. They seemed less given to obesity and much more vigorous than those which frequent our shores, and altogether a firmer and finer fish.

Here I was most kindly received, and, a room being set apart for my use, I decided to try my

luck in the neighbouring streams for the next few days.

JOURNEY TO REYKHOLT.

August 20th.—Having only risen one fish the two preceding days, I determined to drive up to the clergyman's house at Reykholt (Smoky Hill), which lies in the centre of the valley of Reykiadal (Smoky Valley). Numerous columns of steam marked the entrance of this singular district, which yields to none in interest, for youthful geysers and varieties of thermal springs are scattered about it with a lavish hand. Four hours' tedious ride across the marshes, and numerous rivers teeming with seal, of which I killed two, brought me to its entrance, on either side skirted with lofty terraced hills, and a considerable river winding through its centre. Surveying the valley with my glasses, I distinctly counted twenty-seven separate columns of vapour in different directions, some much more dense and vigorous than others. The first we approached encircled a dome of siliceous formation, resting on a bed of clay under the mountain-side; the dome was nearly seven feet in height, and seventy-five in circumference; in the centre was a circular orifice of considerable depth, fourteen inches in diameter, from which the water bubbled, boiled, and overflowed,

YOUNG GEYSERS IN THE RIVER REYKIADAL.

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causing a continual deposit; in the surface of the dome were several minor vents, from which the water also oozed in a high state of ebullition. A cottage stood within a few yards of the hot spring; the site was evidently selected for the convenience of cooking; and in an iron pot lying in the stream which led the waters away the family meal was simmering. I afterwards observed that all the dwelling-houses in this valley, and indeed in all similar districts, were placed in such positions for the like reason. Above, in the face of the hill, a brawling stream came down, losing itself in the vicinity of the dome: it evidently furnished the supply of water to this natural fountain, which might be turned off by diverting the stream from its course, as could the majority of the so-called hot springs in this valley, for they are merely caused by snow-streams traversing heated surfaces, and not by springs from subterranean sources. I subsequently verified this idea by diverting a small stream that feeds Snorro's Bath near the parsonage, which is icy cold, then boiling, and subsequently lukewarm, all within the space of a couple of hundred yards.

Situated in the centre of the bed of the valley, formed entirely of morass, and distant by the banks of the river about two miles, lay a nest of springs, foaming, snorting, and jetting far more

vigorously than any of their neighbours. Approaching with difficulty, we found a mound of narrow red, blue, and white clay, very soft and hot, about twenty feet high and a hundred feet in length, rising from the bog; its surface was covered with grass, save at one end, where, in its face and base, fourteen springs were boiling furiously, and emitting dense and stifling vapours; some of them had deposited a siliceous crust round their margins, and were sending up columns of various heights, and ran down in numerous courses that they had worn for themselves over the bank into the river, the temperature of which they visibly affected, and over its surface floated a constant cloud of vapour.

Two of these fountains, within a yard of each other, erupted alternately — the larger one vomiting a column ten feet high for the space of about four minutes, when it would entirely subside, and then the smaller one took up the running for about three minutes, ejecting a column of about five feet; their regularity in time and force was perfect. What gives rise to this remarkable phenomenon I will not attempt to decide: but there are reliable accounts of their regular habits for the last hundred years. Similar phenomena occur on a smaller scale in this district, and, in the north, one called the "Oxahver" is larger and more

regular in proportion and action, loud reports accompanying each eruption, leaving no doubt that steam is the motive power, and that generated at a very high temperature.

A mile further up the valley, on the same side, near a farm, is a natural steam-pump. In the surface of the rock are three holes, the lowest serving to conduct the water into a neighbouring basin, which is used as a bath, and the two upper ones serve as steam-pipes, whence columns of steam alternately rush out at each discharge, which continues about a minute, when it subsides for about fifteen seconds; the alternate action is very regular.

This point was a source of great attraction to the Scotchmen belonging to the fishing-stations, nearly all of whom were mechanics; their master had mounted them, and given them a holiday, to visit the wonders of the valley, evidently intending to repay himself by the fun their pilgrimage would afford. Two, owing to heavy personal losses, had tailed off before we had done half the distance, under a volley of jibes more personal than polite. However, they had the best of it, for a more rueful-looking lot than the majority on our arrival here I never saw. Sandy, the tinsmith, fairly roared when his companions tried to lift him off. "If your gudewife could only see ye th' noo, Sandy!" said the master. And

certainly he was a curiosity, as he squatted in the saddle with his knees up to his chest; being a gnarled poggy little man, who looked as if he had been sat upon in his infancy to the detriment of figure and features. But no jest could reach him, as they stretched him out more dead than alive.

Presenting them with a bottle of brandy and a couple of tins of preserved meat, which they cooked in the bath, I left them as cheery as mortals well could be who are twenty miles from home, with a few rivers and bogs intervening, and too sore to ride, and too stiff to walk.

Retracing my steps, I returned to the central track which leads to the church at Reykholt; and fording the river no less than four times, its course being very serpentine, arrived at the fifth ford, and here found another of the extraordinary developments with which this valley teems. In the centre of the river, which was deep and rapid, arose at a fordable spot a siliceous oblong mound about 7 feet high and 12 feet in length. Riding my pony up to it, I step from his back on to the base of this promising young geyser, or roarer. In its surface are three mouths, which are continually ejecting boiling water and vast columns of steam: the principle orifice being a couple of feet in diameter, of considerable depth, funnel-shaped, and by far the most violent. Steam

was also escaping from a gravel-bank a little higher up the stream; but that was a mere trifle, my pony walking over it with greatest composure, and eventually taking a drink where the water was warmest. Another hour's ride, in which I again ford the river thrice, and we are at the door of the parsonage of Reykholt.

In historical and antiquarian reminiscences this is the richest spot in the island, for here, 600 years ago, flourished and perished the greatest, and at the same time the meanest, of Icelanders, Snorro Sturleson, the most talented of three ambitious brothers, in whose family many hereditary provincial governorships, together with great wealth and a vast extent of territory, had been concentrated by marriage. In his early days he took kindly to his studies, and, inheriting the sagacity of his parent, at one-and-twenty married the heiress of Bersa the Rich, becoming at a stride the most wealthy and potent chief in the island. In the then turbulent state of affairs—for Iceland was now a prey to clannish feuds, which shortly led to its surrender to the King of Norway—he naturally became an object of hatred amongst his contemporaries, who made continual war on him, and obliged him to fortify this his principal residence; the remains are still visible in that large circular

mound of earth adjoining the house on its southern side, with large stones scattered about it, apparently the ruins of a fortification. The exploration of this mound would offer a great field for the antiquary, as it has never been molested, in spite of the fabulous tales connected with it. At its foot is the "Snorralang," or "Snorro's Bath," a monument of his ingenuity and cleanliness which his countrymen have certainly not inherited. It is circular and well made, about thirteen feet in diameter and four feet deep, and paved; altogether very creditable to the masons of the period, and to the clergyman who has just had it repaired; it is supplied with water from a nest of hot springs about 40 yards distant, which trickle through a course that has been formed for them beneath the road. This has been magnified by a traveller, usually most truthful in his narrative, to a subterraneous aqueduct 500 feet long. However, to return to its founder: he was elected "Lagmann" for the first time in 1215, and attended the Althing with an escort of 800 armed men, and commenced those foreign intrigues which eventually cost him his life. An accomplished scholar, his poems and writings had attracted the attention of the Norwegian King Hakon; and losing the Lagmannship after a three years' tenure, he accepted an invitation to visit that country, where he was most courteously

received. During this visit he collected material for his justly celebrated 'Heimskringla,' or Chronicle of the Kings of Norway, in which he treats with elegance and erudition, not only of Scandinavian affairs during a period of 300 years, but of contemporary European, and especially British history. Although his work is now known by the high-sounding title of 'Heimskringla,' or 'World Circle,' he gave it the more modest one of the 'Saga,' or Story of the Kings of Norway, the former being quaintly adopted by northern antiquaries, as it is the first prominent word in the manuscript. After telling us the sources whence he culled his information—namely, some oral, some from family registers and kingly pedigrees, some from the old songs and ballads of his forefathers, portions of which he constantly introduces—he gives a geographical sketch of the then known world, and tells of a great sea running into the land from the out-ocean, dividing the three parts of the earth; Asia, Europa or Enea, and Blaland, the country of the blacks.

He there narrates how a great and far-travelled warrior called Odin, whom he believes to have lived in the flesh about 70 B.C., dwelt at Asgard; and tells of his conquests and magic powers, of his transformations and miraculous journeys; how he

quenched fire, stilled the tempest, or made the wind blow where he listed; and gravely adds that he died in his bed in Sweden, having previously taken the country under his especial protection.

Tracing the descendants of the Yngling family, he rapidly emerges on less doubtful ground, and, commencing with the more authentic history of Halfdan the Black, King of Norway, runs through the romantic lives of the Norwegian monarchs, and brings their contemporary history down to his own time.

Although his travels do not appear to have extended beyond Norway and Sweden, he describes, with charming simplicity and truthfulness of language, events in all parts of Europe and some portion of Asia, imparting to them a local colour and animation as if he had been personally present at each event—incident, anecdote, and speech developing the individual actors with a dramatic power little inferior to Shakespeare and Scott. Numerous other works are attributed to him, of which the mythological 'Edda' stands foremost. He had a minute knowledge of Greek and Latin, and was at one and the same time an historian and a poet, an admirable orator and a warrior, and may be accepted

as the beau ideal of a type which in his country has long since passed away.

Returning home in 1221, he again became Lagmann, retained the office for ten years, and endeavoured to pave the way for the subjugation of his countrymen, hoping to become viceroy under his patron Hakon; but his avarice, ambition, and domestic feuds caused a universal rising against his authority, and he was chased from his estates and driven to take refuge in Norway. Here he remained, awaiting a favourable opportunity to recover his power and possessions, when, in 1240, hearing that one Gissur Thorvaldson, his son-in-law, had defeated his principal enemies, he returned and took up his quarters on this spot; that gentleman, however, preferring his father-in-law's property to his company, assassinated him shortly afterwards, and thus spared Snorro witnessing his country's degradation, which he had at first contemplated but subsequently lamented. Singularly enough, he, the most accomplished scholar of his day, perished from his want of knowledge of the Runic character, which may, perhaps, be accepted as a proof of how little it was used. Snæbiornsson, an old friend, sent him a warning of his impending fate the morning of his assassination, written in Runes, that its purport might not be divined by the bearer,

but he was unable to read it. Tradition places his body in the churchyard hard by, of which a part still retains the name of his family's burying-place; and a stone in the vicinity, bearing a few illegible Runes, is supposed to have once marked the spot. I accept tradition, but reserve my opinion—the reader may do the same. Not so my courteous host, who is dogmatic, and whose seventy-five winters and venerable presence entitle him to respect; as well as his wealth, which in Iceland, as in other countries, is a *sine quâ non* of respectability. His living is one of the very richest—about 400*l.* a-year, equal to the salary of the governor; all the surrounding farms are his; to speak poetically, he is "monarch of all he surveys"—that is, the entire valley; his manner is most cordial, and he speaks after the fashion of a Spaniard—everything is at my disposition—but so far differs that a subsequent week's residence convinced me he meant it. He introduced me to a Danish veterinary surgeon, who had been sent out by the government to direct the farmers in the eradication of scab, which has lately made great havoc amongst the sheep throughout the island. With this gentleman, who was a capital linguist, I shared the strangers' room—an apparently indispensable establishment in every Icelandic cottage, and always the

best room in the house—and revelling in snowy linen and lashins of eider-down, to say nothing of a morning dip in Snorro's tub, I could not desire cleanlier or more comfortable fishing-quarters.

Snorro's Bath.

CHAPTER VIII.

Calm Sabbath morn — Motley cavalcades going to church — Gossip at the church door — Mode of worship — A forsaken damsel — Return of the lost swain — Close of the Sabbath — Start for Surtshellir — Journey through sleet — Depopulated village of Kalmanstúnga — The Strútr Yökul — Lava desert of Arnarvatnsheidi — the Surtshellir caverns — Brilliant aurora — Visit to the head of the Grimsá — Character of the peasantry — The "skier" — Return to Reykholt — Proposed visit to Snæfells Yökul — A questionable guide.

Reykholt, August 21st, Sunday. — THAT calm and tranquil air which I at least so often fancy ushers in the Sabbath morning in all quarters of the globe was never more evident than to-day, when the very volcanic agencies appeared to have relaxed their energies, as their steam-columns languidly rose towards the heavens, and seemed to beckon the scattered inhabitants of this wild valley to direct their thoughts to things above, with more solemnity than the village bell; even the cattle, as if conscious of the day, relinquished their rich pastures by the river's bank, and, collected in a group at the entrance of the "tun," seemed to enjoy more perfectly at their ease the rare rays of this cloudless morning.

Files of mounted peasants and their children,

dressed in holiday best, were threading their way from the neighbouring farms, and converging on the church, where, on arrival, they tethered their ponies, and clustered round the entrance, awaiting the appearance of the pastor.

These motley cavalcades formed an illustrative link between the present generation and the past—made up, as they were, of all ages, from the infant unconsciously dozing in its mother's arms, to the aged crone who could scarce maintain her balance, though sitting straddle-legged, or support the weight of her fantastic and ungainly head-dress, as she bobbed about like the spring-figure on a child's toy. Not that these veterans are not good horsewomen: I have seen an old lady of eighty-seven mount her pony for a fifty-mile ride, on a wild, wintry morning, with more nonchalance than a dowager would get into her chariot for an airing on a summer's afternoon, and not only do the distance without fatigue, but repeat it the next day.

It was amusing to observe how, tottering as they were on the margin of another world, they stuck to the family ornaments, as their more refined cotemporaries in more genial latitudes do to the family diamonds. Besides the elaborate silver belts which many of them wore, they were further bedizened with numerous filigree buttons, massive hooks and eyes, one or two brooches of saucer-like dimensions and

indefinable pattern, together with earrings to correspond—all of the same material, some few being gilt; heirlooms which had been handed down from palmier days, when their ancestors, maintaining a closer connection with Norway, were still acknowledged by their more fortunate relatives, who held a prominent position amongst the genteel European flunkeyism of that period.

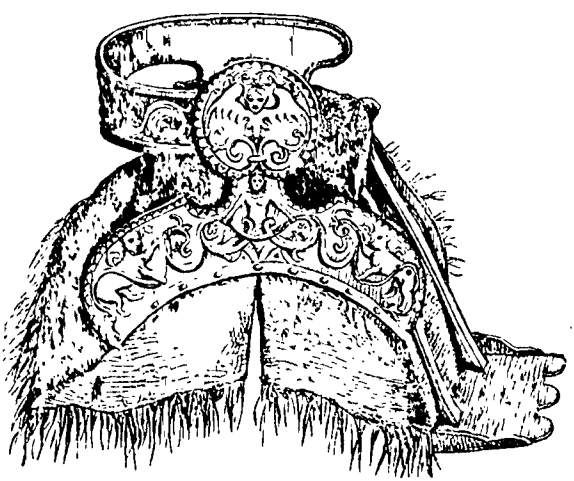
The contrast between their high-waisted, home-spun wadmal gowns, and these relics of the past, with the penny Paisley kerchief which decked their shoulders, eloquent as it was of the high-pressure happiness of our manufacturing districts, suggested many a thought on the stability of modern institutions, and the mazes of the labour-market.

As for the young women, they made as near an approach to the vortex of Parisian fashion as could be reasonably expected under the circumstances; but whoever has seen la Reine Pomare—I mean of Tahiti—in a kiss-me-quick bonnet and crinoline, and can remember her, or her feminine islanders, when their undulating figures were unencumbered save by a few folds of tapa* round the loins, and a chaplet of wild flowers round the neck, or looked on them as they emerged naiad-like from the sparkling waves after a

* Native cloth made of the bark of the paper mulberry.

morning's swim which would have been fatal to most Europeans, with a blush mantling through their olive complexions as delicate as the pink tinge on the lips of a sea-shell—whoever, I say, has witnessed these disfigurations, cannot be surprised at the pardonable weakness of these nymphs of the north: though I could hardly forgive them for their mania of melting all the old silver ornaments they can lay hands on, to be reproduced by their modern tin-smiths in a Brummagem imitation of Maltese frivolity.

Seated in side-saddles—very similar, and almost as roomy, as old arm-chairs whose backs had been cut



Side-Saddle.

down level with one's elbows, in a posse of gaudy worsted coverlets, their substitute for crochet in the long winter evenings—they displayed most substantial understandings, and feet to correspond; the redeeming feature of this get-up being the coquettish cap, which certainly equals anything of the sort I have ever seen. The cap is somewhat similar in shape to those worn by the Greek women, but woven of black wool, with a black silk tassel attached, ornamented with silver; it is fastened on top of the head with pins, and falls pendent over the left ear.

Amongst the men few relics of the national costume were visible: they were for the most part clad in Danish slop-clothing of little account, and cast-off cavalry overalls; but they testified their reverence for the Sabbath by wearing hats, in shape and colour decidedly original.

All were externally scrupulously clean and neat, though many had come a two or three hours' journey through bogs and rivers. It was evidently a day of rational enjoyment as well as religious worship, for all contrived to arrive before eleven, though the service did not commence until twelve. Each new arrival was universally welcomed with the salutation kiss; and the intervening hour was spent in social intercourse, this being the only opportunity the distant population have of meeting.

Though crops, for obvious reasons, were not discussed, the ravages of the scab amongst the sheep produced animated discussion, in consequence of a notice nailed to the church door informing all those who did not follow the prescribed precautions that they would be severely fined. Their apathy in eradicating this disease is most surprising, and, huffed at the Government interference, they offer a passive but stolid opposition, preferring to let their flocks perish rather than submit to what they look on as an interference. The matrimonial market appeared brisk, the younger portion of the community being evidently aware of the uncertainty of life, and that the lost moment never returns; or, as Odin has it, "Whilst we live let us live well; for, be a man never so rich when he lights his fire, death may perhaps enter his door before it be burnt out.".

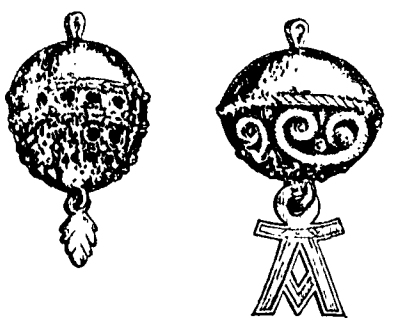
One old man distinctly remembered Mackenzie's visit; and the weird phantom of Ida Pfeiffer, as she flitted through the district, was familiar to many. The appearance of their venerable pastor was the signal for almost universal homage, and they joyfully pressed round to receive his salutation and benediction, as, saluting each individually, he slowly made his way towards the church, accompanied by the three neighbouring clergymen, who had come over to assist him in the service—his declin-

ing years seldom allowing him to do more than preach.

Not being invited, delicacy forbad me to intrude on their worship, which is Lutheran in its most primitive form; service over, the entire congregation were regaled, according to custom, by the rector—the women and children with coffee, and the men with brandy. All then moved off gradually, save his especial friends, who remained to dinner. In the afternoon we rode to a farm in the vicinity, and engaged a guide for the celebrated caverns of Surtshellir, whither my Danish friend has kindly consented to accompany me to-morrow. Here we saw a really good-looking Icelandic girl —Helda by name—abundance of flaxen hair, large blue eyes melting with tears, which perhaps enhanced her beauty. Poor creature! she was scrunched up on an old chest, in an obscure corner, and her story, as the ballad says, was a very simple and a very old one. She would not be comforted, and none seemed to care to soften her sorrow. Eventually I negotiated with her for the sale of some quaint old filigree buttons, and the temporary distraction appeared to relieve her; but when she bestowed the customary kiss—which here seals all bargains, or is tendered in return for a gift—she seemed to wish it was on other lips where she had long since left her heart, and

sank back in her corner the picture of inconsolable woe.

However, before leaving the district, I had the pleasure of hearing of the return of the truant, who had merely extended his fishing trip to Reykianœs; and, subsequently led away by his companions, had been drawn into "fast life" at Reykjavik. With the assistance of the old padre, he soon made amends, and doubtless, as the novels say, will live happy ever afterwards.



Helda's Buttons.

On our return we found a convivial party at the parsonage. Their Sunday terminated at six o'clock, having commenced at the same hour the previous evening.

It was past midnight ere these learned divines took their ultimate stirrup-cups, and we could indulge

in the needful rest for our lengthened journey on the morrow.

To Surtshellir and back.

August 21*st*.—At four we are in the saddle, and a pelting and penetrating wet morning it is; but it is no use stopping for weather in this country. We make for the farm of our guide, who is all ready for us, having only just returned from a neighbour's, with whom he has been passing the evening; he says the distance is as near thirty-five miles as possible, over a miserable road for the most part, with two or three heavy rivers to cross. Being very well mounted by our friend the rector, we made for the head of the valley at a rapid rate, fording and reforded ing the river several times, ultimately ascending by a succession of very fine falls to the extensive plateau beneath the "Ok;" where we joined the great northern track from Thingvalla, which leads across the desert to the northern coasts. The "Ok" is a huge wall-sided yökul which forms part of the vast range commencing at Thingvalla and trending northwards, until it terminates in the Bald Yökul. The weather is wild and wintery and worthy of our visit to the cave of Surtur the demon, who is one day

to destroy the universe with fire, as the Völuspá * tells us. However, he is unlikely to commence operations at present, for it is a perfect deluge, and the vapour, from the numerous hot springs on our left, is beaten down in a sullen murky sheet of mist: as for scenery, it is as much as we can do to keep our eyes open against the driving sleet; but our ponies seem to know the way, and we follow our guide in silence for six mortal hours without seeing a trace of man beyond the impressions of a half-effaced horse-track, when, turning sharply round the shoulder of the mountains, a howling of dogs proclaims our advent at Kalmanstúnga. Before famine and disease accomplished the work of depopulation, it was a village, but now consists of a simple farmhouse, the ruins of a stone church, and an overgrown churchyard, in which are several old stones, but no Runic traces. Apart from his agricultural skill, this farmer is a crafty stone-mason, and every one in the Syssel who can afford the luxury of a tombstone for their departed relatives comes to him, as their ancestors have done to his predecessors time out of mind; he is likewise a cunning silversmith; in short a remarkable man in his way, and quits a half-finished earring to shoe my pony, which done, he disappears

* A Sibylline poem descriptive of Scandinavian mythology, embracing chaos, creation, the future destruction and renovation of the universe, and the abodes of bliss and misery.

with a bridle, leaving us to enjoy some most acceptable café au lait prepared by his wife, and only returns in time to guide us across the two turbulent branches of the White River which here pour down from the adjoining yökuls.

One arm of that stream crossed, we entered a very old lava-field, which contains by far the finest forest I have seen during my wanderings, many of the stunted birch-bushes bordering on eight feet in height. Another hour brought us to the main branch of the river, looking uncommonly ugly, angry, and swollen by the heavy rains; the usual ford was impassable, but ascending its banks for a couple of miles we with difficulty crossed at a place where an extensive sandbank divided it into two branches. Thence we skirted the comparatively diminutive Strútr Yökul, where the summer thaws display the bare cindery sides of a perfectly formed crater, containing a beautifully-rounded dome of blue ice, filling up the entire cup; it looks more artificial than real, so clearly and regularly formed were the edges and sides of the crater. We now traversed a low range which brought us to the entrance of the extensive lava desert of "Arnarvatnsheidi," a portion of the vast uninhabited, and for the most part impassable waste, of which the centre of Iceland consists. Two routes

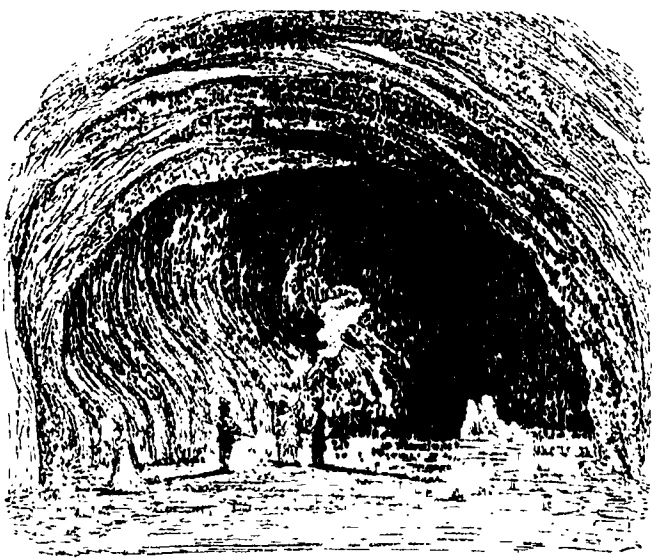
traverse that wilderness; but those crossing must take hay, and in some places even water, for their horses, as no blade of grass exists in that exhausted solitude; its very soul was long ago consumed in the throes which engendered such a desolation of desolations. Whether this distorted and devilish district we are now traversing is the handiwork of Bald Yökul, or the more neighbouring Eyriks Yökul, it would be difficult to determine: be that as it may, this once molten sea has run riot in waves never equalled off the Cape; here it has surged up the face of a mountain, there driven rivers out of their course; until, exhausted in its eccentricities, it has cooled down in a thousand bizarre forms.

Traversing this cast-iron sea for an hour and a half, we suddenly diverged from the route, and made for a heap of stones which served to mark the entrance of the Surtshellir caverns. As far as the eye could reach, or the mountain bases would permit, we were surrounded by a series of domes similar to those near Krisuvik, which I have before described, but these are on a much grander scale, and the formation of the caves at once dawned on me, many of these domes covering a vapour-distended area varying much in height and from sixty to one hundred feet in diameter.

Hobbling our horses, we descend into a chasm caused by a rent in the surface of several domes,

thus forming the vestibule of these Satanic halls; it is about forty feet in depth, fifty in breadth, and 700 in length, and very irregular: about the centre of this passage the roof is almost perfect, leaving only a narrow fissure, in the centre of which a circular aperture illumines the rough passage beneath: at either extremity of this vestibule entrances present themselves into adjoining domes and corridors; one at the southern extremity being much the largest, and it the guide had traversed. We scramble over alternate blocks of ice and rock, and lighting our candles—for we are in utter darkness—first explore a branch on the right, in which were strewed a few bones: of course, our guide, as in duty bound, made the most of them; robbers had made this their hiding-place in ages past, this was the débris of their orgies, &c. We bowed acquiescence, though they were in all probability the remains of some unfortunate wild ponies that, wandering in search of food, had been tempted down by the handfuls of herbage which exist in the chasm, and, on being snowed up, had been driven to this inhospitable shelter. As the roof became inconveniently low and the floor watery, we retraced our steps, and tried the so-called Robbers' Cavern on the opposite side. This was much more extensive and roomy, and hung with stalactites, having a few

horse-bones scattered on its floor of alternate ice and sand. Quitting this, we pursued our way into the main branch, sometimes wading, at other times sliding along on the ice, of which the bottom of the cave principally consists, or scrambling over the blocks which had fallen from the roof. In this catacomb-



Entrance to Main Cavern.

like region we wandered on for about twenty minutes, the size and altitude of the cavern being most irregular, the cold intense, and the travelling execrable, branch routes presenting themselves right and left

from time to time. We now came to an aperture in the roof and an easy ascent to the surface. Though our guide was willing to proceed, and I had every confidence that he would not do so unless it was a matter of perfect safety, so apathetic and timid are the present generation of these islanders, yet I did not see any advantage in prosecuting this subterranean trip, which was not on a sufficiently grand scale to gratify the eye, and at the same time excessively disagreeable and arduous.

On emerging we found we had gradually advanced in the direction of Strútr, and arrived at the surface about a quarter of a mile from the spot where we descended. The weather, which had greatly improved during our underground travels, permitted us to observe the vast yökul range to the westward; whilst in the foreground, about five miles distant, stood the solitary Eyriks Yökul's black, precipitous, and in some places overhanging cliffs; averaging twelve to fifteen hundred feet in height, crowned with an eternal ice-dome, it appeared as if it kept watch and ward over surrounding ruin.

It was already five o'clock when we commenced to retrace our steps, and eight ere we reached Kalmanstúnga, where we halted an hour to refresh our ponies, already much invigorated with the elasticity of the evening; but it was necessary to economise

the forces of these willing little beasts, as they had yet the latter third of seventy miles to accomplish before their day's work would be completed.

The evening was very enjoyable after the hurricane, and twilight was relieved by a most brilliant aurora, which in these high latitudes often follows or precedes any great change of temperature; its pale, sylph-like, and undulating rays flitted about in every direction, and were only extinguished in one quarter of the heavens to be rekindled more brilliantly in another. Gradually increasing in power, its light equalled that of the moon, and, together with the intensity of the atmosphere, threw the distant western peaks apparently at our feet, and distorted them with inconceivable rapidity into fantastic and fairy forms, making inexhaustible demands on the eye and imagination. Brilliant coronas from time to time encircled our zenith, but the climax was attained when a stream of light, rising in the west, seemed to unfold itself from the conical and at this moment supernaturally elongated Baula, and, graciously but slowly advancing, arched the heavens, bisected the pale Road of Winter,* and rested on the glittering blue dome of the Ok as if to favour a fairy migration to that Goshen, of which the otherwise inaccessible Baula is said to be

* Road of Winter: Norse name for the Milky Way.

the entrance, where trees and meads are ever green, and its dwarfish inhabitants have only to regard their countless flocks and herds. This fragile bridge, possessing all the colours of the rainbow, after a brief hour's existence, imperceptibly separated in the centre and subsided towards its apexes, which became more vivid in colour and light as they expired; the flickering rays lighting us down the edge of the precipice, over which roared the never-ending chorus of the falls. Once more entering the Valley of Smoke, we traversed the river again and again, and I wound up the trip by stalking two seals asleep on a bank, after, no doubt, a successful evening's salmon-fishing. Though the aurora was still brilliant I only wounded one of them, who shrieked and flappered into the stream, as much as to say I had taken an unfair advantage of him. Guided by the columns of steam from the various springs, we reached home shortly before three, our ponies doing the last mile as willingly and easily as the first of the seventy they had accomplished in the preceding twenty-three hours.

THE STORY OF THE CAVE-MEN.*

It is impossible to bid adieu to Surtshellir without taking some notice of the many legends and superstitions attached thereto.

* Portions of this story are gleaned from Dr. Konrad Maurer's 'Isländische Volkssagen der Gegenwart.' The extracts are from private papers communicated to him during his visit to Iceland.

Of its great extent there can be no doubt, for the entire plain in which it is situated may be said to rest on a series of volcanic arches. These chambers, often communicating with one another, produce a series of subterranean labyrinths, as yet not thoroughly explored. Eggert Olafson, who prosecuted this research with more ardour than any one else, accomplished in one direction a distance of upwards of eight hundred fathoms, or little short of a mile, but left numerous branches uninvestigated.

These apparently endless ramifications have given rise to the popular superstition, which all in this vicinity devoutly believe, that on the one side it extends as far as Lánganes, the north-east extreme of the island, whilst a passage leads down to Reykianæs in the south, and another to Horn in the extreme north-west.

Some persons yet alive pretend to have known a man who fled into this cave to escape his enemies, and, losing himself, after wandering for several days and nights finally emerged at Lánganes, having had to wade for a considerable portion of the distance through what he imagined to be sand; but on arrival at the surface he found, to his astonishment, that his sandals were full of gold-dust.

Romance has at various times peopled this cavern with Utilegu-menn, or outlaws, whose existence will be treated of in the subsequent chapter; but the

story of the Cave-men, who were supposed once upon a time to have made it their abode, is such a curious mixture of fiction and fact, that it is almost impossible to scout the idea that lawless men have, at some period in the history of the island, made it their head-quarters.

In this neighbourhood, and at Kalmanstúnga especially, there is no manner of question regarding the following story.

Many years since, fifteen pupils of the school at Holar, having murdered an old woman, fled into the uninhabited portion of the country to escape justice, taking with them her daughters. Eventually they chose Surtshellir as their retreat. There they formed themselves into a regular band, and subsisted by making free use of the flocks and herds of their neighbours, at the same time maintaining a pious demeanour by regularly attending divine service in the parish church at Kalmanstúnga, where they always appeared armed, placing themselves back to back, in two rows, in the nave. With the exception of drowning all their children in the lake in the cave, they do not appear to have committed any other murders; and although they maintained a wholesome terror amongst the peasants of the district, they never molested their dwellings, but confined themselves to sheep and cattle stealing.

The peasants, of course, did not much like such proceedings, and were driven to their wit's end to know how to get rid of the Cave-men, but were afraid to attack them openly. Eventually they outwitted them by the following stratagem.

At a parochial meeting, to consider what were the best measures to be adopted under the circumstances, a young peasant of Kalmanstúnga volunteered to join the Cave-men, learn their haunts and habits, and seize the first favourable opportunity of betraying them.

The proposition was unanimously received, and all declared their determination to second him when the moment arrived.

On presenting himself at Surtshellir, though the Cave-men had their suspicions, they liked his appearance, and accepted him as one of the band, after he had sworn the prescribed oaths. He thus became a Cave-man, and conformed to all their customs; but, though well treated, was closely watched.

In the autumn the Cave-men, according to their wont, set out to steal cattle and sheep before they were driven off the mountain pastures, and took the peasant with them, much to his disgust, as he had looked forward to this opportunity to make his escape, having long since bitterly repented of his enterprise.

One man was left in the cave to look after the women.

On their return home with an immense number of sheep, they halted for the night in the Vopnalag (*i. e.* Arm-lowering), here they laid themselves down all in a row on the bottom of a hollow and stuck their arms round them in the ground. It is said that from this custom the place has obtained the name, which it bears to this very day. Arrived at the cave, they forced the cattle through a hole at the top, so they lost no time in slaughtering them.

The young peasant now became more unhappy than ever; he was obliged to assist in despoiling his relatives, and had apparently no hope of escape. His winter and summer were very miserable. When however the autumn returned his hopes revived, and, feigning illness, he declared that he was quite unable to join in the marauding expedition in search of sheep, but at the same time offered to remain behind and guard the women. To this the band agreed; however, as a matter of precaution, they nearly hamstrung him before they departed.

Night set in; he felt that now or never he must make his escape; and, deceiving the two women left in his charge, he with great difficulty crept to the mouth of the cave, and fortunately found a horse grazing there, on which he galloped home.

All the neighbourhood capable of bearing arms immediately assembled, and made preparations, under the guidance of the peasant, to attack the Cave-men: this he determined to do on the night they halted at the Vopnalag.

On reaching the entrance of the valley the peasants left their horses with a guard, and stole up to the spot usually selected by the Cave-men as their sleeping-ground, and there found them slumbering heavily. The first object of the peasants was to steal their arms, and then fall on them; the strongest of the number being selected to cut off the chief's head, who lay in the centre of the gang clothed in a harness of sheep-bones. "It is of great importance for us," said the peasant, "to do so; for that man would injure us grievously if he were to rise. He is the strongest of all the robbers, and they have great confidence in him. He has prepared for himself that harness of sheep-bones, so that no iron can injure him."

They succeeded in removing the arms without disturbing them, but the peasant appointed to cut off the chief Cave-man's head missed his blow, and cut off that of a man lying near him. Now the robbers awoke, and one of them cried aloud, "Take care, thou bone-coat man (Valnastakkr)!" but it was too late, and they cried still louder, "The man who had

the strength of four (Fiögramaki, the four-men-strong one) has fallen!"

A furious struggle ensued, for the Cave-men fought bravely, though unarmed, and a few succeeded in making their escape, but were pursued and killed afterwards. "Thus Thorvalr was killed on the Thorvaldsháls; Geiraldr on the Geiraldargdnipa, to the north of the Arnarusheidi; Atli at the Átlalækr; Asgeir at the Asgeirsbrunner. Another of the outlaws was called Thormodr; he made his way through the country down to the Borgar Fiord, being pursued by men on foot and on horseback. When he came to the sea he rushed into it and swam to Thormodssker; the peasants rowed after him, but when he saw them approaching he hastened up to the Thormodsgnipa, pitched himself into the sea, and has never been seen since." One of these Cave-men, Eirikr, distinguished himself particularly by his strength and resolution. He ran up to a rocky point projecting towards the north from the Eiriks Yökul, but was so hotly pursued by the peasants that one of them who aimed at him struck off one of his feet, just under the ankle; the fugitive, however, helped himself on with his hands, arrived safely at the rocky point, and so went farther over the glacier. That point has since been called Eiriksgnipa, and the glacier then obtained its name, Eirikr. When he

had safely arrived on the summit he is reported to have chanted the following verses :—

"Hiartad mitt er hladid med kurt,
hvergi náir ad skeika ;
med fotinn annan fór eg á burt,
fáir munu eptir leika."

(*i.e.*, "My heart is strongly made, it never can tremble. I escape with one *foot*; few will do the like.")

Though the band was destroyed, a most desperate conflict was yet to come. On the arrival of the peasants at Surtshellir, whither they went to seize the two women and whatever there might be of value belonging to the Cave-men, they met with a furious resistance on the part of the ladies, who defended themselves bravely, hurled down firebrands, and poured boiling water upon the assailants; so that, it is said, they found it a greater difficulty to overcome the two women than the fifteen Cave-men all together. They were, however, at last conquered. It is not stated whether they were killed or not, nor is there any report of treasure found, but all that was in the cave was taken, with all the sheep which the robbers had stolen.

"There are several stories afloat about the fate of that young peasant. Some say he was in time entirely cured of his wounds; that after the death of his father he lived on his farm at Kalmanstúnga, and died there at a goodly age. Others say he had, shortly after the

victory over the robbers, fallen ill, and no one had been able to cure him; that he lived many years in a mutilated state, and had then, whilst alive, shrunk up and rotted away. Again, others tell the story differently: they say Eirikr, after the peasants had returned to their homes, came down again, and went as far as the sea and embarked in a ship that lay there ready to sail. He quickly became acquainted with the crew, and turned out a brave sailor. Some years afterwards, they say, a large, fine merchant vessel had run into Reykjavik with a rich and valuable cargo. The people were ready to buy the goods from the skipper, but it was said in the whole country that this captain did not sell his goods, but gave them away. Therefore came the peasants from all parts of the country, and amongst them was also the peasant of Kalmanstúnga, the very man who, when a youngster, had betrayed the Cave-men. Now, when he appeared on deck there stepped forward a tall, strong, and nimble man, who had hitherto not shown himself. He had a red coat and a wooden leg. He immediately approached the peasant, threw his arm round his neck, and cried aloud that every man from the land should immediately leave the ship if they valued their lives and limbs. The peasants became alarmed, left the ship, and betook themselves to the shore. From here they saw that the merchants

weighed the anchor, set their sails, and went out to sea. It is thought that it was Eirkir, who intended to reward the peasant for his treachery; for it is said that when he stood on the rocky point he exclaimed, 'he would fiercely revenge the Cave-men as soon as a fitting time presented itself.' This is all that the people know about the merchant-man Eirikr, the peasant or the punishment he suffered. Thus ends the story of the Cave-men."

Reykholt, August 27th.—Since my return from Surtshellir my whole time has been expended in fishing, and I have tried nearly every pool in the numerous streams which bisect the valley of the White River, but not with the success which I had anticipated. In fact, nearly all the salmon had departed; except in one favourite pool, named Hokadalsá, where, on the 23rd and 24th, I killed five moderate-sized fish. Of sea-trout there were abundance, and of the mountain-trout a great variety, as in all Icelandic waters not flowing immediately from the yökuls.

On the following day we rode to the head of the Grimsá, about six hours distant, lying further south, and flowing into the White River, where a very intelligent farmer, Sveinbjörn Arnason, took me to a pool near the falls, and I killed a fish of 9lbs. As he thought I might meet with better luck in some of the many pools lower down, and

the weather was uncommonly rough, we put up for the night, and were most hospitably entertained. Differing but little externally, save in cleanliness, our host was far above the average type of peasant, and, besides being well up in Latin and the historical lore of his own country, had a singular insight into the vast improvements in agriculture and manufactures taking place in Europe, and seemed to think that a future was open to his country in spite of soil and climate. English capital, he said, was alone wanting to develop the fisheries and the sulphur-mines; and that the Danish Government was well inclined towards Iceland, and might do a good deal towards draining the bogs and improving the grass and breeds of cattle and sheep—half of which in this division of the island have lately perished, or are perishing, from scab. His library was extensive, and principally Danish. Reading is, however, confined to the winter months; the Althing, of which he is an energetic member, together with his farms and fishings, monopolize the summer. He has a little weakness regarding his ancestry, and at supper calls my attention to the large silver skier bowl, which, with its spoons, has been in his family 400 years. The cream being good, I tried to accomplish this abominable compound, out of compliment to my host, but signally failed. This universal dish

is made of sour whey, the water being allowed to run off, and the curds are then eaten with milk or cream. Though he annually nets many hundred salmon in his waters, which extend from hence to the White River, he begged a few flies to set himself up as angler, and offered me a silver spoon in return; at the same time he told the Danish doctor to order him a rod or line from Copenhagen, or Leith, if it would be better, adding that he will make a reel for himself during the ensuing winter. This, I have no doubt, he will do well, as amongst his other accomplishments he is a cunning smith.

In the morning I tried the pools further down, and ultimately had the satisfaction of landing a salmon over 17 lb. In the evening we returned to Reykholt, and found the dear old rector in very low spirits. He said it was his 76th birthday, and that he could not live much longer; and even if he did, life would not be worth having, as his remaining eye was becoming very weak. I offered him every consolation, and pointed to his father upstairs, who, although he had been blind and bedridden fifteen years, and never shaved, still enjoyed himself. He joined us at dinner, and, the cognac being undeniable, he retired in a happier vein, having at any rate banished his *bête noire* for one night. This good old

man kept his coffin overhead, in the chancel of his church, in obedience to the ancient superstition—not peculiar to Iceland—that this acknowledgment of the impossibility of escaping from the ruthless arm of the Devourer, prolongs life.

As the salmon fishing was not sufficiently good to justify my giving any more time to it, when there was so much to be seen and done in other portions of the island, I asked my hospitable host to provide me with a guide for a tour to Snæfells Yökul, which he was most anxious I should not undertake, assuring me I should fail in my attempt to ascend it, and that I had much better remain to try some other rivers in the western part of the valley. Finding that I would not swerve, he bet me a dollar that I should not succeed, and introduced me to a jaunty-looking elderly gentleman, who said he had often been to the foot of it, and promised to procure me guides. All was settled, horses hired, &c.; and on my friend's departure the rector took me aside, and told me with a confidential air "that he was a remarkably clever man." Being rather curious to know in what direction his talents lay, I interrogated him, when he told me that the individual in question was 53 years old, and only just married. "Better late than never," I thought; but if this is a specimen of his talent, he has been

rather tardy in applying it. "Is that all?" I said to the rector, "Oh, no," replied he; "it's to a widow with twelve live and four dead children." He might either be a brave man, or a very disinterested one; but as regards his cleverness I was not altogether satisfied, and was about to ask further questions, when the pastor informed me that this Lovelace had already had between thirty and forty children, and fathered all but five. Considering the stringent laws which here provide for accidental birth, he certainly must have been a clever dog; but fearing he would do unto me as he had done unto others, I declined his services on account of his moral turpitude, and made my arrangements to ride to Hjardarholt next morning, and consult the Sysselman concerning a guide.

"Happy the nations of the moral North,"

wrote Byron some years since. Without imagining that they are worse than their neighbours, I fancy it is very much like the ideal morality of the so-termed middle classes, which has been of late so ruthlessly shattered by Sir Cresswell Cresswell.

CHAPTER IX.

UTILEGU-MENN.

Origin of "Utilegu-menn" or outlaws — Their favourite haunts — Mode of life — Accused of cattle-stealing — Narratives collected by Dr. Konrad Maurer in Iceland — Dr. Jón Hjaltalín's story — Farmèr Runólf's experience — Adventures of Jón and Nikolás — Night visits for the purpose of trade — Encounters with travellers — Oddr the Wrestler's captivity — Legend of Asmundr.

"UTILEGU-MENN," literally Outlying-men, but what may perhaps be better rendered in English by the term Outlaws, were a race supposed to live on the borders of the desert interior of Iceland; they were said to intermarry amongst themselves, and even to preserve a language of their own. The glaciers in the neighbouring Bald Yökul, and other vast desert localities in the interior, were pictured as their favourite haunts. With regard to their origin, they were supposed to have sprung from that portion of the original colonists who declined to trammel themselves with the laws which their contemporaries adopted, and were gradually recruited by those desperate spirits who had indistinct ideas of the rights

of property; or for other misdemeanour were obliged by law to quit the island, when, instead of leaving the country, they ran into the interior.

They were supposed to exist by plundering the flocks and herds of those who lived on the confines of the uninhabited waste which forms the interior, and also by waylaying travellers who had to cross that district.

Even at the present day many intelligent people declare that they still exist, and one of the reasons adduced on my subsequent return from Snæfells Yökul for not being able to procure me a guide direct to Geyser, was, that we should have to traverse a district that *Utilegu-menn* were believed to inhabit, and, consequently, it was unsafe for a small number.

The chief argument adduced to prove their present existence is, that thousands of sheep annually disappear from the high pasture-lands of the island, leaving no trace of their remains; and further, that this loss is greater always after a severe winter, when the *Utilegu-menn,* having lost all their flocks, are driven to replenish from those of others.

Doubtless, many sheep stray away in the summer, when they are turned out to forage for themselves, and several are carried off by foxes and sheep-stealers; but it is difficult to account for the vast

number annually lost, in any other way than the one before cited.

Nevertheless, for myself, I believe nothing of the sort, except in so far as an extensive system of sheep-stealing may be carried on by the inhabitants of the isolated farms towards the interior of the island; and, therefore, prefer to give the following extracts, collected by Dr. Konrad Maurer during his visit to Iceland, which, though they in a measure tend to substantiate their present and past existence, must be received with great reserve:—

"Dr. Jón Hjaltalín, whilst a student, whenever he went home for the holidays, during the vacation stayed a night with a farmer named Simon, at Dalsmynni, in the Lánjidalr. On one of these occasions he found the household in a state of unusual excitement, whilst arms were lying about in all directions. On inquiring the cause of this disorder, he was told by the farmer, a worthy and credible man, that his boys—having gone a few days ago further than usual towards the mountains, in search of missing cattle—met a flock of from two to three hundred sheep, driven by two men with long staves in their hands, who, by a threatening gesture, warned them not to come nearer. The boys returned home, and, having related what they had seen, sixteen men of the neighbourhood, with their arms, assembled to pursue the

strangers, for there were good grounds for supposing that the sheep they were driving had been stolen. The ground being damp, the track of the flock could easily be traced, whilst at the same time it was observed from the foot-prints that there were four drivers instead of two. The pursuers then rode after them, passing the Baula as far as the Bald Yökul, to which the track led. At last, however, night compelled them to return, for it was unsafe to enter the wilderness after dark, as an encounter with the *Utilegu-menn* was to be apprehended."

The following, also from the same source, is still more recent:—

"Farmer Runólfr, for instance, of Maríubakki, in the district of Fljótshverfi, of the Skaptafellsysla, saw once, in the neighbourhood of Fiskivötn, six men together, whose appearance clearly indicated that they did not belong to the inhabited parts of the island. He likewise noticed traces of their horses distinctly leading towards the mountains, and not towards the inhabited part of the country. Dr. Hjaltalín, who relates this circumstance, communicated another to me, still more characteristic. In the district of Biskupstúngur, on the northern boundary of Arnessysla, there stands Brædratúnga, a stately farm, in which there lived last year, and, as far as I know, lives still, a farmer of the name of Jón, an honest and

trustworthy man. He was asked to ride into the mountains with a person named Nikolás, to shoot swans and gather angelica (hvönn). Once these two men strayed away three weeks, and returned in a very sad plight, the horses jaded and tired to death; Jón had a bad wound in his shoulder, Nikolás was wounded still more severely, and entirely covered with blood. The latter died of his wounds, but Jón recovered, and is now quite well. Neither liked to speak of the affair, though the clergyman of the parish, Séra Björn Jónsson, as well as Dr. Hjaltalín, inquired very earnestly. Jón, however, told the parson that there still were *Útilegu-menn* in the Kaldakvísl, and confessed that he himself had seen them; he even offered to show them out, providing the party did not exceed three persons, that they were accompanied with his dog, and that they would act entirely according to his directions. It is generally supposed that Jón and Nikolás had fallen into the hands of such people, and to save their lives had promised not to speak of them."

Stories are also rife of their occasionally venturing into the places of trade. About ten years since a man who called himself Gestr (*i.e.* guest) came into Eyrarbacka with an unusual quantity of wool and tallow, which he would only barter for salt and iron. His manner was much embarrassed, and, when asked

where he came from, he said from a farm called Landssweit, which no one ever heard of before.

Other instances occur of unknown men coming in at night to trade, generally demanding grain, salt, or iron; and it has been remarked that their horses are sometimes shod with horn discs, instead of shoes.

In a private collection of papers relative to the *Utilegu-menn*, communicated to Dr. Maurer, which in general are very romantic and racy, there are many accounts of their encounters with travellers in crossing the island. From them the two following are selected:—

"In the middle of last century (1743–64), Sigurdr Sigurdarson held office, and resided at Hlídarendi, in the district of Fljótshlíd. He brought up in his house a lad named Oddr, who from his skill in wrestling was called Glímu-Oddr, or Oddr the Wrestler. Sigurdr had some land in the Eyjafjödr, and had sent Oddr there with a message. He told the young man, who was then twenty years of age, to take the Kaldadals track, as that of the Sprengisandr was too perilous. The youth, however, on his way back, chose the latter, as it was the shorter of the two, and he did not think much about the dangers. When he was about half way through the Sand, having the Arnarfell on his right and the

Odádahraun on his left, he observed a man trotting towards him from the east. He was mounted on a brown horse, dressed in knitted clothes of black wool, and had a dark reddish-brown cap on his head. Oddr saw instantly that he had to deal with a *Utilegumadr*. The man dismounted, and made towards Oddr, to pull him from his horse. The latter likewise lost no time in quitting his saddle, and both began to wrestle. A tough struggle ensued, but at last Oddr threw his adversary, who then begged for mercy. Oddr spared his life, but, to prevent him taking any treacherous advantage of this favour, broke his leg with a stone, drew him to a small sand-hill, and left him there. On his return he was asked how he had fared during the journey, and where he got the stout brown nag he had with him; he replied that nothing particular had happened to him, and as to the horse, he bought that in the Northland. A long time after, when Oddr was sixty years old, after he had married and lost his wife, he went to visit a son-in-law of Sigurdr, Porleifr Nikulásarson, at Háfimúli, in the Fljötshlíd; he once accompanied him to the Althing, and after its termination to Reykjavik, but they left their horses at Kópavogr to pasture, as no provender was to be had in the neighbourhood of the former place. One day Oddr went to look after them, when he saw a number of tents pitched in Fossvogr, and to amuse

himself walked about amongst them. He observed three men sitting on the grass at the top of the Kópávogsháls. They had their horses, but, unlike those of the other people about, they were not unsaddled. Oddr saluted them, and discovered that one of them was aged and lame. He asked him if he had ever broken his leg; the stranger replied in the affirmative. When Oddr returned home he related the whole story to an old acquaintance, and added that the man whom he saw sitting on the grass was he with whom he wrestled on the Sand."

THE LEGEND OF ASMUNDR.

There once lived, in the Skagafjördr, a robust, hard-working man, who at the time of the story was about thirty years of age. His name was Asmundr, and he had a habit of wandering every winter into the Southland, whence he was called Sudrferda Asmundr, or the Southland Wanderer. Once, when he and his companions went on one of these fishing expeditions, he was taken ill near Melar, in the Hrútafjördr, and as he was no better on the following day he advised his friends to go on, promising to join them when he recovered. They went away accordingly, leaving Asmundr behind. Next day he felt

better, and resumed the journey. At first the weather was fine, but when he got as far as the heath a snow-storm came on, and not being able to see his way he lost himself. When he found that it was useless to attempt proceeding any further, he scooped out a hole in a snowdrift, unloaded his horses, and piled the baggage at the entrance. He then fastened the horses by the bridles, and went into his snow hut. He cut an opening opposite the direction of the wind, so that he might look out and see how it fared with the weather; then, taking out his provisions, he began to eat.

At this moment a dark-brown dog made its appearance, forced its way through the snow, looked fierce and savage, becoming more angry as Asmundr continued eating. He did not take much notice of the animal, but at last threw it a good-sized sheep-bone. This the dog took up, and ran out of the hut. Not long after, a tall, elderly man came to the entrance, saluted Asmundr, and thanked him for his kindness to his dog. "Art thou not Asmundr, the Southland traveller?" he asked. "So people call me," was the reply. "Well," continued the stranger, "I will give thee the option of remaining where thou art, or of accompanying me, for the storm will not cease till thou art dead. For thou must know that I am the author of this storm as well as of thy illness.

I have need of thy services, for I know that thou art the most resolute man in this neighbourhood." Asmundr, seeing that there was no alternative, preferred accompanying the stranger to perishing in the snow, so they both went off together. In the mean time the storm had ceased, and the weather became fine. The stranger went first, and Asmundr, with the horses, followed; but he could form no idea where they were going, as he had lost his way. After they had journeyed some time, a little valley appeared before them, with a brook running through it, with a farm on each side; and Asmundr was surprised to observe that, whilst one side was quite red, the other was perfectly white with snow.

They now turned towards the farmyard, which lay on the side of the valley covered with snow. The man put the horses into the stable, and gave them some hay; then he led Asmundr into the farm and sitting-room. Here he found an old woman and a good-looking young girl, but no one else; he saluted them, and the old man offered him a chair. The woman was continually muttering to herself how bad it was to live without tobacco; Asmundr, hearing this, drew a pound of tobacco from his pocket, and threw it towards her, which made her quite pleased and happy. The stranger and the girl brought something in the mean time to eat, and, whilst Asmundr

was eating, his host talked to him and seemed very cheerful; when he had finished eating, the man and the girl went out together. Asmundr suspected that the subject of their conversation was how they might murder him. The old man soon returned, and invited him to retire to bed, to which Asmundr consented. The old man now led him to an outhouse, where there was a bed prepared, and wishing him good night he left; but the girl remained, and helped him to take off his wet clothes, and wanted to carry off his shoes and stockings to dry them. To this Asmundr objected at first, thinking that some treachery was intended, but he allowed her to take his things away when she assured him that no evil would befall him; she then kissed him, wished him good night, and withdrew. Asmundr thought these proceedings in the house of a Utilegumadr very singular: he nevertheless very soon fell asleep, and did not wake till it was broad daylight, when he saw his host standing by his bedside. The old man bade him good morning, and told him that he should now be made acquainted with the reason of his being brought here. "Twenty years ago," he said, "when I lived down in the country, I ran away with a relative, and was consequently obliged to flee to these parts. The old woman whom thou sawest last night is my sweetheart, the girl that showed thee to bed is the child she bore.

When I first came to this place, certain Utilegu-menn lived in the farm on the other side of the brook; there are still two of them there, and they have all along been enemies of mine. Hitherto I have been able to hold my own against them, but now they have got the upper hand, and cause all the snow that falls to drift to my side. I used to feed my sheep on their land on the other side of the brook, but now I am not strong enough to do this. I should like thee to take the sheep this very day to graze there. I know that thou art a resolute man, and the matter in hand requires boldness; both my enemies, thinking that I am with the sheep as usual, will attack thee. But in order that thou mayest defend thyself, thou shalt have my brown dog, which will powerfully aid thee." Asmundr then got up, took the sheep; the old man putting his cap on his head, and giving him his axe. No sooner was he on the opposite side of the brook than two outlaws came running, thinking that Asmundr was the old man. They cried out loudly, "Now he is doomed to die." When they came closer they saw they had made a mistake, but nevertheless began to attack Asmundr. He set the dog at one of them, and turned upon the other himself. The dog very soon threw down its opponent, and, being now two to one, Asmundr very soon finished the other. Towards evening Asmundr returned to the farm with the sheep. The old man

came out to meet him, and thanked him for his exertions, which he said he had witnessed from a distance. The next day they crossed the brook, to look at the farm of the two dead men. The building was spacious, well built, and full of property, but they saw no people. At last they came to a door, which they were unable to open; but Asmundr, by a violent lunge against it, burst it in. It led to a small outhouse, where Asmundr and his companion found a beautiful woman tied by the hair to a post, but who looked pale and careworn. Asmundr unbound her, and asked who she was, and where she came from? She replied that she was the daughter of a farmer at Eyjafjördr, and had been carried off by the two outlaws; they wanted to force her to marry one of them, and because she refused to do so she had been ill-used by them, under the impression that her obstinacy would at last yield to their harshness. Asmundr told her what had happened, and that she was under the protection of honest people, which greatly rejoiced her, as she now felt that she was saved. They afterwards carried everything they found there to the other farm, where they remained during the winter. Asmundr liked the old man very much, but the two girls a great deal better, particularly the daughter of his host, who had been taught a great many useful things by the maiden from Eyjafjördr. In the spring the

old man told him that he might return home, and come back again in the autumn, for he said he would himself be dead then, and Asmundr might take away his daughter, his wife, if still alive, and the girl from the Eyjafjördr, together with the property on the farm. Asmundr accordingly rode home to the Skagafjördr, where he was received by his relations as if he had risen from the dead. He told no one where he had passed the winter, but next autumn he returned again to his friends of the valley. They received him with great joy, told him that the two old people had died, and had been buried by them in an adjoining hill. He passed the winter in the farm, but in spring he started northwards with the two girls and all the property, and returned to Skagafjördr. There he bought a farm, and married the old man's daughter; he gave the girl from Eyjafjördr in marriage to one of his neighbours; and thus ends the legend of Asmundr, the "Southland traveller."

CHAPTER X.

REYKHOLT TO SNÆFELLS YÖKUL.

Start for Snæfells Yökul — Reach Stafholt — Service in the church — Use of churches as halting-places for travellers — My guide to Snæfells — Dealings in horseflesh — Unfrequented route — Antiquity of the "Smith" family — Lively, Blithespeech, and Chatterbox—Lady valets de chambre—Varied nature of the lava-field scenery — A farm imbedded in lava — Ellborg crater — Singular geological transformation — Consequences of disregarding a guide's counsel — Supply of drift-wood — Approach to Buda — Intelligent Sysselman — Tradition of the Yökul demons — Olafsvik — Quaint-looking craft — Prospect of reaching the summit of the Snæfell's Yökul.

August 28th.—THE bald head of old Snæfell has been occasionally gazing at me ever since my arrival; and especially of late, when returning from my fishing trips, it leered out from its usually foggy canopy, and, catching the last rays of the departing day, seemed demon-like to challenge me to attain its summit. Yielding to this fascination, after five hours' tedious riding, for the most part across morass and three rivers, one of which—our old friend the Huitá—was so rapid and deep that we had to cross in a boat towing our ponies, we arrived at Stafholt about two o'clock, and found the inhabitants in the

middle of divine service, in which, by invitation, we joined. The clergyman was very energetic, and the service was conducted with great decorum and reverence; but the chanting was not calculated to soothe a ruffled spirit. The principal portion of the service was intoned by two priests, the entire congregation joining at intervals; and the sermon, which occupied the best portion of an hour, was delivered from notes, in an impassioned strain well calculated to stimulate the feelings of the congregation, whose riveted attention and earnest demeanour showed that their understandings and imaginations were being powerfully worked upon. The church was densely crowded, for the neighbouring ones were comparatively deserted to listen to this the most popular preacher of the valley.

Service over, the individual who had officiated as clerk introduced himself as the owner of this extensive and well-to-do farm; and, on learning my wishes, at once offered himself as my guide, and likewise to horse me, for the sum of three rix-dollars a day (English, six shillings and eightpence); this included five ponies, two for each of us and one for my baggage, which was even considerably lighter than that recommended by the Conqueror of Scinde to his officers, and consisted of Michelet's l'Amour, a tooth-brush, a square of brown-windsor, a flannel shirt, and a

pair of stockings. As for provisions, beds, tents, and troops of baggage-ponies, with which travellers usually encumber themselves, why, I'll have none of them, and the worst that can ever betide me is to sleep in a church, or on a sack of new hay, and have to live on bread, coffee, and milk, which are always to be had in abundance: if I want meat and do not like their salted mutton, it's my own fault if I do not draw on the natural resources of the country; for duck, ptarmigan, plover, or snipe, all are as tame as sparrows, and may be shot during the day's ride from the back of my pony.

To sleep in a church may seem somewhat sacrilegious; I ought therefore to mention that the churches, save in crossing the deserts, when tents are necessary, are the usual halting-places throughout the island; and whenever the clergyman's domicile is full all strangers sleep there as a matter of course. Travelling with tents, provisions, &c., brings your progress down to funeral pace at once, for the day's journey must be regulated by what your baggage-train can accomplish; and this not being a country to dawdle in, my object was to move with the greatest possible speed from point to point, and I accordingly determined to be unencumbered.

Taking leave of my kind Danish companion, whose duties prevented his accompanying me, I was now

fairly launched on my travels, and thrown on my own resources as interpreter: this I accomplished without much difficulty under the combined influences of dog Latin, a few Danish and Icelandic phrases which I had coached up, together with gesticulation, which I held in reserve for emergencies.

However, it was six o'clock before I could get my friend the clerk to make a start; he was afraid that I should not have a good house to sleep at if we started so late; it would be better to wait till to-morrow; but I had already had sufficient experience of an Icelander's to-morrow, and was inexorable. Finding it hopeless, he returned his Sunday hat to its accustomed peg, and took down number three, ancient of years, with its little remaining fur turned the wrong way, and of a brilliant brick-dust red. If this extraordinary termination to the head be unsightly and inconvenient in civilized life, you may imagine how much more out of place it appears in these wild wastes; but here as there it is the correct thing, and every respectable Icelander is, on Sunday, so far the victim to fashion.

We are now floundering through the Syssel, *par excellence*, of bogs: it does not belie its name, and more than once our advance seemed doubtful; but a diminutive native on a capital grey is ramming it into every slough, apparently to exhibit its cleverness in

extricating itself, and also to induce me to become the purchaser. Our friend is about to proceed to Copenhagen, to complete his education,* and he naturally wishes to raise all the money he can for the trip; but I had enough of buying ponies in Reykjavik, and should never advise a traveller to purchase. Always pony yourself at so much a day: it can be done at every farm in the island, and is not only cheaper but more expeditious; as, with all their simplicity, an Icelander would as soon sell you an indifferent bargain at a high rate as he would do the contrary, and your guide, if you are in an out-of-the-way place, will not fail to secure ten or fifteen dollars in the transaction for himself. In fact, that special honesty which in the old world and the new usually characterizes transactions in horseflesh is nowhere more apparent than here; and another advantage in hiring is, that the proprietor will be much more likely to look after the shoes and backs of his *own* ponies than of yours.

Shaking off our friend on the grey at a ford of the Huitá, we crossed and ascended the mountain range which forms the back-bone of the promontory we are now entering: it stretches out some

* Although the thirst for knowledge is not nearly so rife among the modern Icelanders as it was among their ancestors, several go annually to Copenhagen with this sole object.

sixty miles due west, divides Faxe and Breida Fiords, and terminates in the Snæfells Yökul. Here we leave the great valley of volcanic activity that divides the island, and enter a region in which old and new igneous formations are exhibited in inextricable confusion.

The track, of which we only see indistinct traces from time to time, leads gradually up to the base of the extinct volcanic district of western Skarsheide, which frowns over the northern shores of Borgar Fiord. Human beings seldom pass this way, save, perhaps, at the end of each summer, to collect the sheep that have been left to browse where they could find sustenance, and whose consequent wanderings necessitate a general gathering of the peasants to collect and divide their flocks.

At ten o'clock, Stadarhraun, the usual halting-place, was still a good three or four hours distant; we therefore turned aside by mutual consent to seek shelter in the house of the Althingsman of the district. We found it overlooking the surrounding solitude from the slopes of the old West Skarsheide volcano; and our reception being cordial, and the opportunity propitious, I produced a slip of paper from my pocket-book, which bore the modest request, in the purest Icelandic, that the bearer wished to be put to bed with all the honours, after the most approved but somewhat

absolute fashion of the country. Supper despatched, in which Iceland moss, stewed to a jelly in milk and eaten with cream, formed one of the principal and far from disagreeable dishes, all retired, save Mr. Smith, the M.P. for the Syssel, who solemnly proceeded to pull off my boots, whilst his younger daughters, Blithespeech and Chatterbox, prepared the stranger's bed in the corner of the room. I have chosen the ubiquitous homonyme of Smith for the Althingsman, together with those of Lively, Blithespeech, and Chatterbox for his three fair-haired daughters, not only out of deference to the domestic circle by whom I was so hospitably received, but also from the important part those individuals played in Eddaic literature, as well as to demonstrate the antiquity of the great family of Smith. In the 'Rigs-mál,' one of the thirty-nine poems of the 'Eldder Edda,' we find that a sturdy Scandinavian yeoman of that name, together with his brothers Stiffbeard and Husbandman, were the sons of Churl, the son of Afi (grandfather), who was the immediate offspring of Ask and Embla, from whom descended the whole human race, and who had the honour of pledging a bumper with a celestial deity as their common ancestor. The ladies Lively, Blithespeech, and Chatterbox likewise flourished in the same generation.* To return to

* 'Northern Antiquities,' p. 366.

their present representatives: the joint efforts of Blithespeech and Chatterbox have produced gaudy new coverlets, their handiwork during the past winter; old chests have been rummaged for linen, which is disinterred from rolls of packing, where it is evidently kept for extraordinary emergencies.

Lively, the eldest daughter, soon entered to exercise her prerogative of putting the stranger to bed, and, I am bound to say, she peeled me with a rapidity and dexterity somewhat astounding. My host now gave me his blessing and departed. Feeling somewhat abashed and embarrassed at my unprotected state, I blew out the light and slipped into bed, not knowing what other ordeal might be entailed upon me. The ladies then retired; but as I was on the point of dozing off, I became aware of the presence of these angels by their whisperings, and recognised the voices of Blithespeech and Chatterbox, who, apparently doubtful of my locality, satisfied themselves tangibly, and retired.

Having broken my shins over a three-legged stool in a futile attempt to fasten the door and prevent further intrusion, I composed myself once more; but Blithespeech soon appeared lamp in hand, followed by her sisters, respectively armed with a bowl of milk and a bottle of brandy: the former was deposited by my bedside; Lively thrust the latter under my

pillow, and, bestowing a most unsentimental kiss, departed.

August 29th.—Waking at four, I found the ladies grouped in the front of the house, hay-rakes in hand, on their way to the "tun," for a bright morning was too valuable to be lost even by these inherently dilatory people; and with the assistance of one of the girls I re- oved my guide from his bed amid shouts of laughter, and with much less ceremony than had graced my entrance last night. Traversing a perfect wilderness of random ruin, amongst craters of every size and form, we wound our way between Skarsheide and similar ranges, crossing the promontory towards the north. But it must not be imagined that the scene is one of tame uniformity. New forms and new colours present themselves at every moment: here we have a red, vitrified-looking inland sea, tossed hither and thither by the once surging vapours beneath, the surface of its waves blown into a thousand fantastic shapes, as if regiments of demon glass-blowers had chosen this as the scene of their labours. Now a huge ash-cone has to be mounted, or a rapid trout-stream to be crossed, on the banks of which rushes and grass have made a home for water-fowl. Another couple of hundred yards, and the stream disappears under an old moss-grown lava-field, where the ptarmigan do congre-

gate. Now the sun lights up the alternate craggy black peaks and snow surfaces of the surrounding ranges, and, shining here and darkling there, develops the veriest contrasts in light and shadow, and those deep, rich neutral tints which ever grace mountain scenery. Emerging from the pass, we skirt the vast lava-field which separates us from Faxe Fiord—looking this morning so calm and tranquil, and stretching away with glossy surface to the foot of the Yökul. From time to time we pass isolated farms nestling at the feet of the mountains, and towards eight halt at Stadarhraun, a farm embedded in lava. Here the range trends abruptly north, its spurs running out into that lava waste which, with little intermission, surrounds this portion of the fiord.

Isolated in the midst of the ruin, with which it has deluged the plain, stands one of the most singular craters in the island. It is a sand-and-cinder hill crowned with a dark vitrified rampart of lava, resembling a gigantic old embattled turret, some 600 feet in diameter: hence its name of Ellborg, or the Fortress of Fire.

After we had given our ponies a good rest, three hours' more tortuous riding brought us to the foot of this natural fortification; then the north wind came down bitter and piercing, with fog, hail,

and snow, soon obliterating the brilliant morning. Three hours more lava-field, then three hours of morass, and I was forgetting my sorrows at the hospitable table of Geir Bachmann, the rector of Miklaholt, who kindly presented me with a portion of the advertisement sheet of the 'Times,' seven years old, to beguile the time whilst my ptarmigan and wild-fowl shot during the ride were being picked and roasted.

Ellborg, or Fortress of Fire.

August 30th.—The weather is, if possible, worse than yesterday, and so thick the mist that much time is lost before the ponies can be found. Buda,

our next halting-place, is a small port under the yökul, and nominally six hours distant. With difficulty we escape from our kind hosts, but promise to call on our return; and having lionized the church, the best specimen that I saw out of Reykjavik, and comparatively rich in tawdry lace vestments, indescribable ecclesiastical daubs, and other church properties, we break away on a three hours' ride across the marshes, that here extend from the sea to the base of the mountain spur with occasionally elevated or firmer spots. A curious geological transformation appeared to be progressing on the summits of these elevated tracks: they presented, in many places, bare surfaces of the finest black mud, the edges of which were often so soft that it was impossible to get the ponies over them; where, however, we succeeded, the surface was found gradually to harden towards the centre, and it was there firm enough. The mud, in many cases, had separated itself into perfect basaltic forms, not always regular in their number of sides. Into the interstices round the head of each distinct column, numbers of little stones had gathered, forming a complete and regular line of demarcation; and what appeared to me at least more remarkable was, that the surface of each column was perfectly smooth, and devoid of these stones, which were particles of the adjacent lavas.

The area of the columns was generally larger in proportion to the extent exposed, and the size of the stones increased in much the same ratio. I had previously observed similar formations on a much smaller scale between the thermal waters and salmon river at Reykjavik. Beyond mentioning these facts, I will offer no opinion, save that they are well worthy of the attention of any geologist who may pass this way.

Here, for the first and last time, I disregarded my guide's advice, and took a line of my own, thinking that I might make a short cut. He begged me not to go, and I left him on his knees at the edge of the most dangerous portion of the morass, ordering him to proceed his own way with the remainder of the ponies. I floundered on, and subsequently bitterly repented, as I not only ran considerable risk to no purpose, but very nearly lost my pony; and I strongly recommend any one who may travel in Iceland never to stray from the heels of his guide, in a morass, or at a ford, with the idea that a shorter route is practicable.

Staggering through these quivering quagmires—the worst I had yet crossed—I struck the beach three hours from Buda, at the same moment that my guide came by, and, it being low water, had a glorious gallop over the hard and extensive sands which intervened.

Here lay bleaching the ribs and vertebræ of many a whale; two masts, evidently belonging to some large hull, whose fate shall only be known when the sea gives up her dead; and several baulks of timber, many of the largest size: some of them have been borne northwards by the Gulf-stream from the American continent; others, probably, once formed a portion of the cargo of some ill-fated timber-ship, too many of which are annually lost—the most notoriously unseaworthy hulls being always employed in that trade.

Besides the Gulf-stream, the current from the northern coast of Asia bears its tribute of drift wood to the shores of Iceland, the north-western portions of the island receiving the greatest abundance, either stream impinging on its shores. These two currents were apparently ordained to compensate for the deficiencies and the nakedness of the land: they supply the natives with fuel and building material, and their accumulated drift in ages past has likewise, without doubt, created those extensive beds of bituminous wood locally termed "surturbrand," a very fair substitute for coal, of which the north-western peninsula presents three distinct layers. None of the family of gigantic plants which distinguish the "coal formations" can be traced in the surturbrand, but merely the trunks and branches of trees, and sometimes the leaves and bark of the birch and poplar

are visible; the parent trunks having been borne thither embedded in the drift ice, with bark and leaves uninjured, as they often are found to be at the present day.

But we are fast approaching Buda, snugly ensconced—like Hafnar Fiord—in an ocean of lava, at the foot of a very ugly red conical crater, one side of which has fallen in. The port, formed of a deep channel worn in the sand by an ice-river, was completely filled by two small Danish coasters moored to the stores of Mr. Gudmundseon, a large trader with the surrounding farmers and fishers. Here I was fortunate enough to find the Sysselman of the district, Mr. A. Thorsteinson, who addressed me, to my astonishment, in excellent English, and, on behalf of the before-mentioned gentleman, begged me to come in to dinner, a most welcome invitation after my uncomfortable ride. It was with difficulty I could persuade myself that I had not suddenly been transported to Denmark, this being by far the most liveable and best appointed house I met with in the country. As for the yökul, which towered above us and had led me to Buda, no one knew anything about it; there were traditions of travellers having made the attempt, but no one had actually reached the summit, and the natives who accompanied them in their journeys were dead.

The Sysselman, however, thought Olafsvik, a small seaport on its northern shores, would be the best place to make the attempt from, as on that side the ascent was more gradual; he happened to be going there, and I readily agreed to accompany him.

Our route lies due north across the mountain-chain, beneath which tradition, or rather superstition, places a subterranean passage from the yökul to the valley of Hytardal, near Stadarhraun, created for the convenience of Bârdr, the demon of the yökul, in his visits to Hyt, the demoness of the valley, betwixt whom a Plutonic affection is reported to have existed. Considerable labour has been expended in our zigzag track, the turnings being marked with large pyramids of stones, highly necessary in the winter months. Halfway we turn aside to taste one of the many mineral springs with which the district abounds, termed "ale-wells" by the natives, without much reason, unless it be from the strengthening properties of iron, with which they are highly impregnated. Crossing a shoulder which I should estimate about 2000 feet above the sea, we opened up Breida Fiord, and commenced a gentle descent, for the most part shrouded in mist. We skirt some black basaltic-looking precipices to our left, cross two foaming torrents which carry a portion of the yökul waters to the sea, and reach Olafsvik, pleasantly situated on a small but

verdant tongue of land extending from the foot of the cliffs into the fiord, and forming an indifferent roadstead. A Noah's-ark-looking Danish galliot is here anchored, rolling her sides out waiting for a cargo of fish: she has been there fourteen days without being able to communicate, owing to incessant northerly gales. Struck by her quaint build, for she might have brought over Floki—him of the ravens—I inquired her history. Her age was seventy-three, and she had made the trip to Iceland regularly every year from her birth; in spite of her antiquity she went on increasing in value, as she and one other vessel were the sole remaining craft in receipt of the Danish Governmental bounty formerly granted to all vessels fishing in Iceland: her comrades had been lost in one way and another, and from her appearance it is not unlikely that she may soon follow.

Mr. Thorgrimsen, her consignee, received me most hospitably. He was almost as well housed as his compatriot at Buda, and kindly procured me two men out of the village to accompany me in the attempt to ascend the yökul. Beyond their search in the summer for stray sheep near the limit of perpetual snow they knew nothing of it: nor in fact did any one else—all declared it inaccessible, and that no one had ever accomplished it. However, I knew that two

or three persons had at various times been within a few feet of the summit, and were only stopped by impassable crevasses, or a wall of ice too precipitous to scale, and, as these were constantly changing, I did not despair; besides, I felt certain that success depended more on good weather and the state of the ice than on any physical exertion, as the yökul was certainly not more than 6000 feet high, though as to its exact altitude there is great difference of opinion.

CHAPTER XI.

To Snæfells Yökul.

Fierce northern blast — Ascent of the Snæfells Yökul — Meet with dense fog and snow-storms — Danger from frost-bites — Abandonment of the ascent — Descent above the Keflavik lava district — Basalts of Stapen — Return viâ Grundar Fiord — Pass of Bulaudshofdi — French trading-station — Utilisation of the fisheries by the French for reserves of seamen — Failure of the French Abbé to proselytise the natives.

Aug. 31*st.*—The piercing northerly gale—which had been blowing with little intermission for fourteen days, still raged fiercer than ever this morning in spite of the old fable which has credit here, that a north wind never lasts more than a fortnight, and it was accompanied with snow-fogs and hail-storms, in a great measure due to the vast fields of ice that had beset the northern shores during the summer, and which now formed in a compact belt some 30 miles from the coast. In this capricious climate, however, it was just as likely as not to turn out a fine afternoon, with a light westerly wind: I therefore thought it better to push up the yökul as far as possible, and

be ready for a change. With a pair of spiked shoes in reserve, a compass, and an iron-tipped staff, plenty of milk, and a basket of provisions in case of accidents, I at last rode off, together with two men who had volunteered to accompany me—I cannot call them guides, as they knew no more of the actual ascent above the snow-line than I did, and seemed possessed with a religious horror of the difficulties to be encountered. Endless were the adieux on the part of the wives and families of these worthies: indeed, the village generally appeared to think them bent on suicide. The ascent commenced almost immediately, and was abrupt and difficult until we gained the summit of the spur, at an elevation of about 2000 feet; we then continued advancing amongst the ash-hills, and heaps of pumice and scoria, with which this side of the yökul is strewed. The general aspect of this plateau, which forms its base on the north side, is trachytic; resting, or rather fenced in many parts of the sea-shore, with basaltic formations: nowhere on this side did I see any symptom of a lava-current, or even fragmentary portions. Advancing, and occasionally gently ascending, amongst these hills for two or three miles, we approached the snow-line of the shoulder of the yökul: all signs of vegetation had long since made way for the naked evidences of volcanic devastation,

and we gradually merged into a region of snow and fog. Tying our ponies together head and tail, in such a manner that they could with difficulty move, and that only in a circle, we got into our spiked shoes, and commenced, half benumbed with our long three hours' ride in this bitter morning, the real business of the day. The weather began to mend, and occasionally we obtained glimpses of the ice-covered shoulder lying before us, apparently offering an easy ascent over a smooth surface, at an angle of about 45°; but neither of the three summits into which the crown of the yökul is divided ever favoured us with even a glance. Here, on the margin of the snow-line, my hopes revived on finding a horse-shoe encrusted with rust: in all probability cast by some of Mackenzie's party when they attempted the ascent some fifty years since. Reminiscence of one failure, it only prognosticated another more complete—save that they were stopped by crevasses and we by snow-fogs.

Hoping ever, we pushed on in the driving fog: sometimes only just able to distinguish each other at a few yards' distance, or catching occasional glimpses of two small cones lying on either side, like two watch-dogs at the portals of this phantom castle. The fresh sprinkling of snow, of the previous night, afforded a firm footing over this otherwise slippery

surface; and we advanced rapidly, in spite of the partial darkness, in a zigzag course, with no other guide than the contour of the mountain, for my compass seemed temporarily bewitched, and did nothing but spin round and round at a racing pace.

The ice, as yet, was singularly free from crevasses, —I attribute it to the eternal fogs that prevailed this summer having prevented the sun operating with its usual power; but, unable to discern our way, or where the next moment might bring us —for our actual knowledge was confined to the fact that we were ever ascending—I attached the party Alpine-fashion; and leading the way, occasionally encouraging my companions with brandy and snuff, I led them up to the foot of what I judged to be the eastern or lowest cone of the yökul, in spite of many remonstrances and the increasing steepness of the ascent—to say nothing of one or two ugly crevasses. The snow was now falling fast, and our eyes became dazzled; from three to five yards was the utmost we could separate without losing sight of one another; added to which, my companions doggedly refused to advance another inch; and as my only object in the ascension was to enjoy the magnificent panoramic view, I thought the best thing to do was to halt for lunch—it being one o'clock—and hope for a clearance, at any rate

sufficient to light us down. Hitherto, whilst ascending, an ordinary shooting-jacket had been oppressive, but half-an-hour's halt intimated that it was necessary to keep moving. I took care our feet were well buried in the snow: for two of my companions, in my last mountain trip, were frost-bitten on a sunny afternoon in the middle of summer, in a much more genial clime, owing to the neglect of this most necessary precaution; and though they did not feel it at the time, and subsequently made a descent of some 15,000 feet without inconvenience, one lost both his feet, and the other one, within the week.

It was absolutely necessary to keep moving; yet wandering amongst the labyrinth of crevasses and snowdrifts which we had just entered was anything but inviting, however exciting it might be. The weather, if possible, becoming worse, I determined to get well down the mountain before our traces were effaced by the fast-falling snow: and, knowing that my companions' desire to descend was only exceeded by mine to advance, I put the lightest forward, myself in the middle; and after a few difficulties, which would have made the fortune of a member of the Alpine Club, we found ourselves somewhere on the cold shoulder—where, it was impossible to say, as we had lost our tracks, which were almost effaced by the

driving snow. But as our goal was the reverse of Longfellow's ideal, we rattled on—ever downwards—and eventually hit the snow-line, we did not know where; but subsequently emerging from the snow-fog, found ourselves immediately above the extensive lava-districts of Keflavik, about three miles to the westward of the spot where we had commenced our ascent.

All below was bright and beautiful, and the precipitous terraces of the northern shores of Breida-Fiord, together with its numerous bays and hundred islets, were brought almost within hail by the intensity of the atmosphere on this crisp, wintry afternoon; yet the sullen old yökul, in its "bonnet de nuit" of cloud and mist, never once deigned to show, in obedience to its tutelary demon, Bârdr, of whom legends tell that he will not fail to punish any wayward mortal who may have the audacity to trespass in his snowy realms.

It was six o'clock before we found our ponies, and then not without considerable trouble—such were the twistings, turnings, and sameness which distinguished the chaotic rubbish-heaps which bound the snow-line. Our poor beasts had not moved—indeed, they could not—and looked the personification of misery and resignation, with a heavy coating of snow accumulated on their saddles and between each couple; but

they are used to it, and, like everything else, there is nothing in it when you are; and they pulled down the mountain-side as gaily as if they had just left a well-littered stable.

STAPEN, VICINITY OF SNÆFELLS YÖKUL, TO GRUNDAR FIORD.

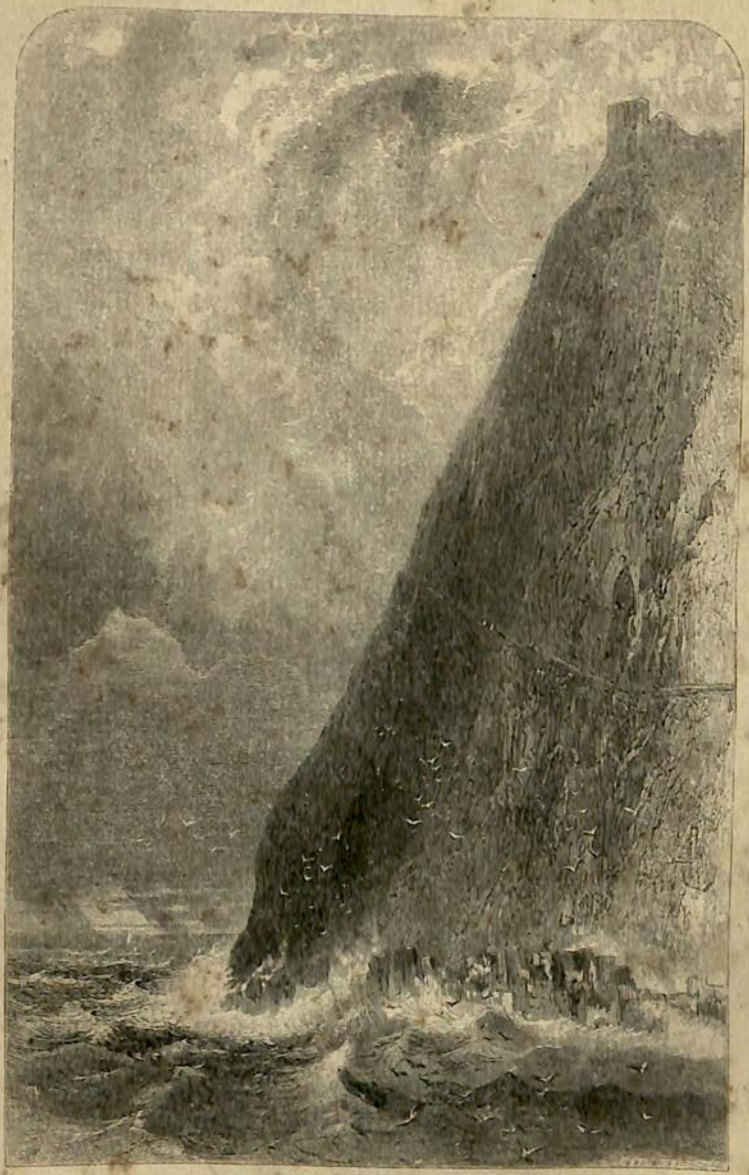
September 3rd.—Since my failure to ascend the yökul on the 31st ult., I have paced about the foot of it, like a bear round his pole. Yesterday I prowled about the snow-line, in hopes of an improvement in the weather, which at times appeared inclined to mend, but never cleared sufficiently even to induce me to make a second attempt. Of course the oldest inhabitant had never known such weather, the north wind had never been before known to last so long; and so I had lingered on, devoting one day to the basalts of Stapen, riding round by way of Buda to avoid the dangerous pass at the base of mount Ennit. The approach to Stapen is wild and picturesque; streams of lava, as on the western side, have flowed down from the many mouths of the yökul, but all are very old: indeed, there has been no eruption since the memory of man in this promontory; a few "warm waters" alone attest its slumbering powers. Nearing the small trading station, the path lies along the brink of a basaltic precipice, which in

part lines the bay: here and there the waves have hollowed out the extensive caverns, and in some places rents and chasms render the way nearly impassable; but all is on a much more diminutive scale than Fingal's Cave or the Giant's Causeway. At the western extremity of the terrace—in which the columns are about fifty feet high and regular in form—are some singular irregular and elongated blocks standing out in the sea: they are of the same formation, but in horizontal instead of perpendicular layers, whilst those of the main body on the shore, with which they were evidently once connected, are heaped about in every direction.

As there was not the slightest improvement in the weather this morning, and as I was unable to afford any more time, I very reluctantly commenced my return to Reykholt by Grundar Fiord and the northern shores of the promontory. At the latter place I intended to visit the French Abbé; and, it being only five hours distant, I waited until noon, in the vain hopes of gale, hail, and sleet abating, but the weather grew, if possible, more spiteful; and taking leave of my kind host and the Sysselman—who seemed positively grieved that I should set out in such a tempest—with an extra guidé for the various inlets we intended to cut off at low water, I started on certainly the most

uncomfortable five hours' ride I ever had in my life. The northern blast, which swept down on us laterally, drove the sleet and hail clean through one's boots and waterproofs; there was no escaping from its fury, as we skirted the cliffs and bays which bound the fiord; and I now realized the fact, which I had before scouted, that it is not an uncommon thing in this country for a pony to be unable to make progress against the elements; for keeping one's eyes open when facing the storm was impossible—the hail fairly beat down our eyelids.

The sea was too high to permit us long to continue our course along the beach, as we had intended, and we were compelled either to return or take the pass of Bulaudshofdi, which, on the finest day in the year, is well calculated to try the firmest nerves, but in such weather was really tempting Providence to an insane degree. However, the guide willing, on we went: the track led midway across the face of a bold promontory running out into the bay and terminating in a jagged precipice, a scant 25° out of the perpendicular, resting on some lofty basaltic cliffs, which moaned audibly under the lash of the Atlantic; whilst its towering and almost overhanging summit, attaining an altitude of upwards of 2000 feet, was garnished with layers of semi-detached rocks which any gust might bring down. Beneath



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THE BULAUDSHOFDI PASS.

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these a crumbling bed of débris extended to the basalts below, and midway across this treacherous surface we were condemned to pass. The track* is visible here and there; but frost and rain are ever at work disintegrating the mountain side, and at every step our ponies sent young avalanches of stones and rubbish into the abyss beneath. More than once one went sliding down in a heap of it, but our surefooted and sagacious animals remained perfectly steady until the mass, brought up against some projecting rock, ceased to travel, when they moved on as if nothing had happened. For fervid magnificence this scene could not be surpassed. Beneath, almost under our feet, though a thousand feet below, the insatiable seas were gnawing and undermining the very precipice to which the gale and sleet were pasting us. Above, there was no hope; loose, very loose blocks of rock, momentarily checked in their headlong course, were balanced here and there, as if halting for breath on their road to ruin, and ready to resume it at any moment.

To retrace our steps was impossible, and there was nothing to be done but look straight ahead and trust in Providence, who, after all, generally takes more care of people than they do of themselves. After a

* Owing to a misconception, an apparently-built causeway has been inserted in the engraving.

quarter of an hour of this ordeal we rounded the shoulder: the descent commenced, the footing became firmer; and as I sat listlessly in my saddle, and gazed vacantly into the future, I saw the "Coffin" and "Sugar-loaf" looming in the distance. Those two remarkable mountains are not only distinguished for their similarity to the objects whose names they bear, but also from their horizontal stratification—the layers of which, though some distance apart, are in exactly the same parallel line. Sometimes passing beneath precipitous cliffs, down whose faces numerous waterfalls vainly essayed to pour themselves, but were immediately swept upwards again by the circling eddies of the never-faltering gale; at others crossing the beds of bays and inlets vacated by the tide; we arrived shortly after five at the French trading-station, standing by itself in the centre of the high beach which forms the head of the fiord. Here I was most kindly welcomed by the Abbé Bernard, who, after the first salutations were over, courteously asked whom he had the honour of addressing. I told him my name, which did not give him half the information he required, as he was rather astonished to see a European drop apparently from the sky. "But where do you come from?" he asked. "Snæfells Yökul," I replied. "Mon Dieu! que cherchez vous?" said the astounded Abbé,

more bewildered than ever. "At present, your hospitality. I am on my way to Reykjavik by the geysers and Hekla, and shall be happy to take any letters for you." "Thank you! those two French smacks you see in the bay start for France in a couple of days; but let me give you a dry suit, for we dine in half an hour." The proprietor now entered: he is a French surgeon, who has left off torturing, and taken to catching cod, and providing for the many wants of the numerous French smacks which frequent Breida Fiord; and as it may serve to illustrate one of the many strenuous efforts the French Government are unostentatiously making to establish a more powerful reserve of seamen than any country has ever yet possessed, it will not be inopportune to review the Icelandic sea fisheries, which are not only monopolized but carefully fostered and subsidized by the French Government.

This year there are 269 French vessels engaged, varying from 40 to 80 tons burden, and manned with crews amounting in all to 7000 fishermen; not merely hardy and able-bodied seamen, natives of the Channel and Biscayan ports, but men who for the most part have served their appointed time in men-of-war.

The owners of these vessels receive a subsidy; and the crews, besides an annual bounty of 50 francs, cheap tobacco, clothes, &c., participate in the rewards

held out for service in the French Navy—from further service in which they are exempt, save in the event of hostilities. Three men-of-war are constantly cruizing with them, and in the ports they frequent, to afford them any assistance they may require—either in men, spars, provisions, or medical aid. It is needless to remark, that, from the severity of their occupation, and the careful training they have received, no such formidable reserve of trained seamen exists, except those engaged in a similar occupation, and under similar regulations, on the banks of Newfoundland, where they amount to nearly 20,000 men.*

Whether these vast reserves, coupled with the maritime conscription and ever-increasing *matériel* of the French Navy, will enable our neighbours successfully to oppose us by sea, time only can show; and as, in all probability, the fact will ere long be determined, it is idle to speculate on the subject: but certain it is, that, whenever France may please to commence, she will start with tremendous odds in her favour; and if she does not win, will deserve to lose. For, whatever amount of material we may create, the *personnel* of a marine can never be improvised, especially in these days of rifled cannon and

* I am aware that the official return inserted in the 'Moniteur de la Flotte' of seamen engaged in the cod-fisheries is only 14,929.

revolvers; and no amount of pluck or patriotism can compensate for a studious contempt of organization, and the supposed maritime inferiority of an essentially warlike nation, who, though they may not inherit our amphibious instincts, have ever been worthy foes by sea and land. And France by her numbers and organization may be able, on the sudden outbreak of a war, to strike such a blow at England as may ring the death-knell of our maritime and mercantile supremacy. It may be true, as is complacently stated, that we always lose the first force we send into the field, and only condescend to put forth our strength in the second or third campaign: one naval disaster in the Channel—either from impotence to man a sufficient number of vessels to combat with the fleets of Brest and Cherbourg (which can be thoroughly manned in 48 hours during the greater portion of the year), or the effects of novel appliances for the destruction of man, or from those unforeseen casualties which must ever characterize maritime war, where the forces cannot be moved with the regularity which railway trains ought to attain—will certainly cut out heavy work for the Volunteers, and perhaps enable the Zouaves to relieve the Whigs in Downing-street.

A few of the crews came into the store during the evening, and one did me the honour to sell me, after

a great deal of negociation, a pair of petticoat trousers. It was not the francs which troubled him, for he would hardly receive enough to pay him for the material, let alone the trouble of making; but he did not seem to think that I attached sufficient importance to the fact that he had made and painted them himself. As for the "Medico," he is a thorough cheery Frenchman; longing to be home, whither he is going for the winter, yet coming to this inhospitable spot to lay by a little money for his daughter. He, together with the "mouche," turned out a capital dinner. The latter is a quaint, diminutive specimen of humanity, from the neighbourhood of Finisterre, and is one of those oddities who never appear to have had any childhood, but have slipped into the world of a certain size and age; and eventually sniggle off under much the same condition and circumstances. His master alternately cuffs and *tutoyes* him, his chief complaint being that he cannot speak French, —his patois is indeed infernal.

Monsieur l'Abbé talks candidly of his failure to proselytise the natives—"Ils sont si bêtes"—there's no making any impression on them. He has been in the island two years, together with his colleague, who is coming here to join him for the ensuing winter, and they have not made a single convert. In a room overhead he has an altar fitted up, and often says

mass in full vestments, which many islanders attend; but, as he says, in reality for no other object than to get a glass of his brandy,—it is better than their own,—when the service is concluded, according to the custom of the country. Both these gentlemen had travelled much, here and elsewhere; and, in addition to their natural politeness, possessed that thoroughly national appreciation of the moment in which they live, instead of battening on the past and the deeds of their grandfathers, or fumbling for precedent, as my own countrymen are prone to do, though unwilling to allow it until they wake up to find themselves left behind in the rapid course of events. As I intended pushing on to Snoksdal, in Dala Syssel, to-morrow—nearly 35 miles in a direct line, and upwards of 50 by road—the considerate Abbé insisted, at an early period, in tucking me into his own bed, and administering a nightcap in the form of some liqueur champagne: a present from a fellow-townsman when departing from his native city of Rheims on his missionary enterprise. Where he slept I do not know; my speculations on that head were cut short by the fatigues of the day.

CHAPTER XII.

GRUNDAR FIORD TO REYKHOLT.

A self-seeking guide — Hamlet of Hallbiaruareyri — Runic tomb-stones — Berserkia lava-field — Tradition of the Berserker Brothers — 'Eyrbyggia Saga' — Temple of Thor — Tradition of the idol Thor being cast into the sea by "Big-beard" — Feasting and fighting — Helgafell — Circle of stones — Blot-stein or sacrificial stone — Explorations of Eirik the Red — Irish colony — Valley of Hoam — Lungarvatn — Flocks of swans — Hjardarholt — Return to Reykholt.

Sept. 4th.—MY patience was sorely taxed this morning by the negligence of my guide, who, after making a merry night of it, rose not only sorrowful, but with difficulty, in the morning. Unfortunately he was a popular man, and had evidently condescended to accompany me in order to avail himself of a favourable opportunity of paying an inexpensive round of visits; but his years and courteous manner disarmed me, together with the luxurious breakfast proffered by my considerate hosts, who, not satisfied with that, insisted on provisioning me for the day. Long may they live to disburse their disinterested

hospitality! The weather was but little better than yesterday, and all the adjacent mountains covered with the heavy fall of snow of last night; but well fortified within, and protected without—where I suffered most—by my afore-mentioned additional small-clothes, we moved off about six, well up to the hard journey before us. Want of time compelled me to abandon the idea of visiting the several interesting spots which lay scattered along the southern shores of the fiord, many of them connected with the early history of the island.

At the extremity of the promontory we are now crossing lies the hamlet of Hallbiaruareyri. Near it are two Runic tombstones, cut in basalt; the earnestness and simplicity of their inscriptions—

"Here rests Fridgerdur Gunnar's daughter: pray for me."

"Here rests Marfreda Feirm"—

contrasting pleasingly with the fulsome elogiums that too often mark the rest of more modern sinners.

At nine we halted at the entrance of the extensive red vitrified Berserkia lava-field, so called from a large cairn lying nearly in its centre, and which tradition points out as the burial-place of two famous Berserker brothers who were murdered in the vicinity. A certain number of Berserker were

generally to be found at all the petty courts in Scandinavia, where, renowned alike for their strength and magical powers, in an age when matters of doctrine and right were often settled by trials of strength, they might not be inaptly termed the court bullies of the day. These worthies were said to have been originally organized by Odin in his proselytising expeditions, who endowed them with a portion of his supernatural powers; and they seem to have held a position somewhat analogous to the more fanatical followers of the Prophet.

A low wall, in some parts composed of massive blocks, intersecting this district, is pointed out as the handiwork of the before-mentioned brothers under the following circumstances:—Halli, the elder of the two, fell desperately in love with Asdisa, the daughter of their patron Styr, whose brother had imported them from the court of Haco, then regent of Norway, to assist him in his marauding expeditions. The lady was a haughty, fiery, robust damsel, well qualified to captivate the heart of a Berserker, but whether she responded to his passion is uncertain, as he went straight to her father and demanded her hand; who temporized on the ground that he was out of funds, and must therefore consult her family. In much tribulation, as he felt that his daughter would demean herself by espousing a

Berserker, though loth to lose the support of these champion brothers, he hastened off to consult Snorro, the district pontiff, and together with him repaired to the temple at Helgafels to hold conference with Thor.*

In the evening, on his return, Styr announced to Halli that, as he could not redeem his bride by payment of the prescribed sum, he must, according to an ancient custom, perform some difficult task; hoping by these means to shunt him off.

"And what shall that task be?" demanded the suitor. "Thou shalt form," said Styr, "a path through the rocks at Biarnarhaf, and a fence between my property and that of my neighbours: thou shalt also construct a house for the reception of my flocks; and, these tasks accomplished, thou shalt have Asdisa to wife." "Though unaccustomed to such servile toil," replied the Berserker, "I accept of the terms thou hast offered." And with the help of his brother he accomplished this superhuman task in the shape of the path and boundaries now visible. On the last day, as they were labouring at the conclusion of their task, Asdisa passed by gaily attired. Then sang Halli:—

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* This story and the quotations are taken from the translation of 'Eyrbyggia Saga' by Sir Walter Scott.

"Oh, whither dost thou bend thy way,
Fair maiden, in such rich array?
For never have I seen thee roam
So gaily dressed, so *far from* home."

Then Leikner, the other brother, also sang:—

"The cause, O maid benign! display
Of that unwonted raiment gay;
Nor thus disdainful pass us by
With silent lip and scornful eye."

But Asdisa, neither appreciating the bards nor the poetry, passed on without deigning to answer.

In the evening the champions repaired to Styr's dwelling, profoundly exhausted in strength and spirits, and he begged them to refresh their energies in a warm bath which he had just constructed. Here, taking a mean advantage of their prostrate condition, he drowned one and stabbed the other, and composed the accompanying ditty touching his exploit:—

"These champions from beyond the main,
Of Iceland's sons I deem'd the bane:
Nor fear'd I to endure the harm
And frantic fury of their arm;
But, conqueror, gave this valley's gloom
To be the grim Berserkers' tomb."

When Snorro heard of the success of the stratagem, he at once espoused Asdisa, and, the activity and intrepidity of Styr being added to the wisdom and experience of Snorro, their power became omnipotent. At least, so says the 'Eyrbyggia Saga;' and I do not

see why we should doubt it, for love and murder have been occasionally hand and glove through all time. Styr's cottage is still pointed out, and every peasant in the island narrates the story.

Escaping from the lava, our route lay amongst the mountains to the head of the bay above Stickesholm. The thick driving mist and snow-storms seldom permitted us to see more than their sides; and it was noon ere we came to the head of the very deep bay running up from that trading station. Stickesholm is situated at the extremity of a promontory connected with the main by a very narrow isthmus called Thorsness, celebrated for the large temple erected in honour of Thor, in the year 883, by one surnamed "Mostrarskegg," from the size of his beard. That individual, a large proprietor in Norway, finding it too hot for him, cleared out for Iceland, at a tremendous sacrifice—as many others did about the same time—carrying with him not only his idol, but the earth on which the altar stood. Acting in accordance with the precedent of the period, on arriving at Faxe Fiord he cast the image of Thor into the sea. The idol swam, or perhaps rather floated, round the shores of Snæfells Yökul into Breida Fiord, and landed on this spot: hence the temple which Big-beard richly endowed, besides levying tribute for its maintenance from all around.

Chronicles relate how, when sacrifice was offered on the altar in the middle of the temple, the entire community assembled, bringing everything needful for feasting, and how strict orders were issued that no one should come without ale.

They go on to say that cattle and horses were slaughtered, and that the idols, walls of the temple, and congregation were sprinkled with the blood of the animals, but the bodies were wisely boiled, blessed, and eaten in the centre of the temple. The pontiff-chieftain who presided then blessed the ale, and the first bumper was drunk in honour of Odin, for victory in battle; the second to Niord and Frey, for peace and plenty. The next toast was "Braga-full"—the mighty heroes that had fallen in battle—and then the business of the evening commenced. The wildest orgies ensued; old feuds were sometimes renewed, and, quarrelling over their cups, too often ended in bloodshed, or they pelted one another with the horse-bones picked in the earlier stages of the entertainment. That this was not altogether infants' sport, I merely mention that Elphege, Archbishop of Canterbury, was killed in this manner at a similar entertainment in A.D. 1011. On the introduction of Christianity the old heathen toasts were abandoned and the heads of the faith substituted. This unintentionally impious custom was for many

years in vogue amongst all good Scandinavians, and to it may, I believe, be traced the origin of health-drinking in Europe.

Helgafell, or holy hill, previously alluded to, which rises a few miles off, was regarded as the immortal resting-place of these primitive inhabitants, unless their military prowess entitled them to join Odin in Valhalla in an eternal round of conflict and conviviality. At the foot of the hill lived Snorro Goda, one of the most powerful pontiff-chieftains, who married Asdisa and carried on great atrocities. Amongst the many victims of his intrigues and cruelties was Arnkell, as famous for his virtues as his destroyer was for his vices; a tumulus marks his ashes.

A small tongue of land in this promontory is pointed out as the site of the provincial assembly, until it was removed to Thingvalla; and in a swamp hard by, half buried in the morass, is a circle of stones, in the centre of which is a blot-stein, or sacrificial stone, on which human beings or cattle were offered as expiatory sacrifices in honour of Thor, and to appease his anger. The fragments of the circle are still visible. Although we have it on undoubted authority that human sacrifices were offered up here, and in one other spot in Iceland, the practice was by no means general, and apparently fell into

disuse amongst the colonists; but their Scandinavian kinsmen, for years afterwards, continued to sacrifice numbers of victims at their various festivals, though they again were a mere trifle to a Mexican hecatomb. Generally they selected slaves or prisoners of war, and nine was their magic number. On great occasions, however, they were not content with such mean victims; but even selected their kings to purchase Divine favour or the nation's weal. Donald and Eysten, kings of Sweden, were thus burnt in honour of Odin, to put an end to great dearths. If it did no other good, it certainly made one mouth the less, and was decidedly a novel and practical purpose to turn a king to.

On the opposite side of the bay is the church of Narfeyri: near it, in the early days of the occupation, lived Geirrid, whose memory is sanctified for her unbounded hospitality—a virtue of the highest repute in those unsophisticated times.

Again resuming the coast route, we passed Breidabolstad, between four and five o'clock, but could not afford to halt, as we were still six hours at least from Snoksdal. It was from a small island in this neighbourhood that Eirik the Red first started to explore Greenland, and subsequently assembled the ill-fated expedition for its colonization, of which more than half the vessels—twenty-five in number—were lost.

Further on, at the entrance of Dala Syssel, tradition points to the site of an ancient Irish colony. Certain it is that considerable intercourse once existed between the two islands—more particularly in the earlier days of Icelandic history. Along the shores of Hvams-Fiord the road improved considerably; but the rising tide caused us to make long détours, and it was past midnight ere I was comfortably established on a bundle of hay in the church at Snoksdal.

SNOKSDAL TO REYKHOLT.

Sept. 5th.—Though we were scarcely 40 miles from the head of Hruta-Fiord, on the northern coast of the island, I was compelled to start south for Reykholt, on my way to Geyser, at a very early hour; and in so doing bitterly regretted that I had not come up to Iceland by the previous steamer, which would have given me another six weeks, and enabled me to make the tour of the island at my leisure. Distant but a few hours' ride was Hvam, one of the loveliest valleys in the island, famous for the establishment of Christianity by a bold pirate's widow, named Audur the Rich, who set up a cross on the wildest craig in the valley, which still bears the name of Krossholm. There, escaping from persecution and mundane affairs, and surrounded by the majesty of nature, she worshipped

her God in peace; but with her death idolatry was again inaugurated, and an unroofed temple occupied the place of the cross. Snorro Sturleson was also born here; and from a mound near the church he and many other chiefs administered their departmental authority. Further north, on the shores of the fiord, numerous "thermal waters" are found, and around its hundred basaltic islets many thermal springs arise in mid sea.

I am wending my way through wild mountain-passes towards Lungavatn in the south. It is considerably out of my way, and is famous for the number of swans which frequent its shores. As the day advances I obtain occasional glances of my old friend Baula, far away on the left; and the earth is reeking with exhalations drawn upwards by a vigorous sun, which man and beast alike enjoy after the perpetual drenching to which we have been lately subject. Six hours' journey is accomplished in four; and before noon I had killed my first swan on the banks of the lake, after a tedious stalk on my stomach of at least half a mile, keeping all the time a solitary tuft of grass betwixt my wary friend and myself. Their death-hymns, are not melodious, but their whistle, as they stream along overhead, is shrill and plaintive. With some magnificent sea-eagles I was less fortunate, lying out

motionless on the bare rock for more than an hour in hopes of enticing them within shot; but they were not to be done, as, soaring above me, they seemed to know the exact range of my gun.

At five in the evening we reached Hjardarholt, and saw the foaming Huitá rushing out into the Borgar-Fiord. Procuring a relay of horses, we were off immediately for Reykholt, having to go considerably up the valley to find a passable ford. The farmer on the banks was enlisted as a supernumerary guide, and very good-naturedly left his hay-stack—at which his family were all busily employed, though ten o'clock at night—to guide us across, and through the bogs, to Reykholt. It was very dark when we arrived on the banks of the river, and I must confess I did not half like it. Turbulent, muddy, and deep, our ponies were immediately well up to their shoulders, and it was all they could do by inclining themselves against the current to keep their legs. One false step, or stumble, and it would have been all over; as, what between gun, jack-boots, and waterproof—to say nothing of a fall whose murmurs in the inky stillness of the night seemed to say, I am ready for you—there would not have been a single point in our favour.

With much difficulty we picked our way through the trembling morasses, and it was one in the

morning before I was entering, like a thief in the night, an upper window of the parsonage, to the consternation of the female portion of the community—all attempts below to rouse these heavy sleepers having entirely failed.

On offering the farmer, who had kindly been my guide for the last three hours, a couple of rix-dollars, to my surprise he would only accept one; giving as a reason that one was ample payment for the amount of work done. I mention this incident, as it not only serves to show the value of labour here, but to do justice to the individual.

As for the old rector, his first question was whether he had won his bet; and, being answered in the affirmative, arose to welcome me. After mortifying the flesh on cold salmon and bread and milk, he insisted on my recounting my trip, over a pipe. At three the entire family turned out hay-making, and your humble servant into bed.

CHAPTER XIII.

REYKHOLT TO GEYSER.—(HAUKADAL.)

Preparations for a start to THE "Geyser" — Wet outset — Most desolate route — Reminiscence of former visit — Troops of wild ponies — Blue foxes — Their curious mode of bird-nesting — Journeying in the dark — Dangerous pass — Hrafnagiá, or "Fissure of Ravens" — Meaning of "Geyser" — Extensive and fertile basin — Lovely landscape — Rich dairy district — Dangerous ford — Geyser Island — A walk amid the geysers — A night by the geysers — Eruption of the Strokr — Visit to "St. Martin's Bath" — Dinner cooked in the "Strokr" — Local ideas on the geysers — Eruption of The Geyser.

September 7th.—YESTERDAY was wholly consumed in engaging a guide and horses for Geyser, Hekla, and thence by Reykium (Little Geyser) to Reykjavik, and in getting ready for the journey. My stock of provisions and groceries I gave to the Danish surgeon, who would probably winter in the valley: for I much preferred rapid travelling and no impediment, and was quite satisfied with milk, black bread, the produce of my gun, and a sleep in the churches by way of lodgings; instead of having to pitch a tent late after a hard day's ride, and perhaps to turn out once or twice during the night in heavy

rain to prevent its being blown about my ears, besides standing a very fair chance of being washed out unless a good trench was dug round it.

In spite of all my efforts I could not get away until nine, when, taking an affectionate leave of the good old rector, his family, and the Danish surgeon, I started in a deluge for Thingvalla, the first halting-place on my way to Geyser. I had hoped to force my way right across country, but could not obtain a guide who had ever made the journey, and was therefore obliged to content myself with going all the way round by Thingvalla.

Ascending half way to the head of the valley, we crossed the mountain range, and commenced our pilgrimage over the bald undulating water-worn plateau, that extends from the foot of the Ok, along the base of the yökul range, as far as Skalbreidé, at the head of the Thingvalla valley. Enveloped in rain and mist, we hurried over this most desolate of desolate regions, intersected with numerous lakes, the favourite haunt of the swans, who in this solitude strive to escape the eternal war waged against them for their skins, which are sold in Reykjavik at the comparatively low figure of a rix-dollar. In the winter season they become so debilitated that they are easily knocked down with sticks; now, however, they are wild and wary, and I with much diffi-

culty stalked a couple during the midday halt. Not until evening did the weather begin to mend and disclose the mountain range at the head of Thingvalla valley, and the spotless summit of my old friend Skalbreide Yökul, a few miles on our left, separated from us by one of its numerous lava-streams. It was with feelings of pleasure I recognised my old hunting-grounds; and the thoughts of the cheery week I had there spent dispelled the gloom which a hapless forty miles' ride through comparative darkness had engendered. A troop of wild ponies persisted in joining us, evidently for society's sake, glad to see their own species once more, and in spite of the whip were most reluctant to return to their wilderness. Many of these troops are to be found in the uninhabited parts; they are left entirely to shift for themselves, even through the severest winters, when many annually perish from inability to find sustenance; yet their owners would sooner see them all die than drive them down to the ports and dispose of them to the Scotch dealers at a moderate price.

Here I saw the only blue fox I met with in my wanderings; they are most audacious thieves, especially in the winter months, when they prowl about the homesteads, pilfering everything edible, from old shoes to brushwood. A missionary who

visited these regions in the past century, and whose narrative is a charming mixture of truthfulness and simplicity, gives the following somewhat naïve account of their cunning in bird-nesting.

In the north-western coasts, where the ledges of tall overhanging cliffs offer nesting to myriads of seafowl, squads of these freebooters assemble, and, having first by mimic combat ascertained their relative strength, they march to the edge of the precipice, ranged in regular order, headed by the weakest; then, seizing one another by the brush, the weaker end of the chain is gradually eased over the precipice, until it reaches the level of the ledge frequented by the fowl. Supported by the more potent links, an undulatory motion is imparted to the overhanging portion, and the lower fox is enabled to catch the ledge, when he proceeds to plunder the nests of their eggs; this accomplished, and the signal given, those supporting the chain back inland, and bring their companions once more to terra firma.

As these animals are not marsupial, it does not appear that any one profits save the weaker, the lowest in the link. This, being contrary to brute law in the abstract, imparts discredit to the proceeding; nevertheless, "si non è vero, è ben trovato."

We now left the great northern track which we had

hitherto been traversing, and, crossing the range, struck into and down the valley to the church on the banks of the lake. A pitch-dark night obliged us to get a guide from the solitary hamlet at its head to pilot us safely amongst the winding fissures and abysses which yawned in every direction, —for this portion of the surface of the valley is split up into longitudinal crevasses, as numerous and very similar to the cracks in the rind of an overripe melon, only that they average from twenty to fifty feet, until the surface of the water is reached, which again, from its azure hue, may be of any depth.

Nought was visible, and it was only the cautious pace of our ponies as they methodically and individually scented their way, and the occasional ominous plunge of some detached piece of lava proclaiming the proximity of perdition, that gave us an insight into the somewhat perilous ordeal through which we were passing. Had I been anywhere else but on the back of an Iceland pony, I should not have half liked it, but such is my confidence in them that I felt that fact franked me from all danger. It was past midnight when we disturbed the Padre, who was not at all displeased, having a keen eye to the main chance. He had built additional rooms on purpose for Europeans who might pass this way; in short, set up a sort of "roadside house,"

in opposition to the farmer in the centre of the valley with whom we sojourned during our former stay. He made himself very agreeable, and seemed to entertain pleasing reminiscences of "Plon-Plon's" visit, who greatly admired his daughter.

September 8th.—Sending my fishing gear, extra ammunition, and books into Reykjavik, by eight I was traversing the Hrafnagiá, or "Fissure of Ravens," by the narrow causeway which leads out of the valley on its eastern side, and was at last fairly on my way to *the* Geysers. In Icelandic this word simply means "rager," and is applied indiscriminately to all noisy water or mud fountains; but as at Haukadal there is by far the most violent, noisy, and perfectly formed fountain in the island, they are therefore termed *par excellence* THE "Geysers."

A rugged shoulder crossed, the route skirted the base of the particoloured ash and cinder cones which stretch away to the eastward, and form a rampart to the valley of Laugardal on its northern side. That fertile and extensive basin is ornamented by two broad lakes, the Laugarvatn and Apavatn, and numerous rivers; the waters of the whole blending in the Bruará, which swells the turbulent Huitá, a little beyond yon purple range in the south-west, near Skalholt, in old times important from the power wielded by its bishops. Those three snowy cones

immediately backing it, about forty miles distant as the crow flies, form the summit of Hekla; whilst away towards the south that interminable and towering yökul-range is the scarcely less renowned Eyafialla, whose acquaintance we formed on making the coast. Numerous steam columns are ascending in every direction in this rich grass-clothed basin, especially near the borders of the lakes; and away in the north-east the "Reykia-hver," more vigorous than all the others, is at first mistaken for the Geyser. Many large farms are sprinkled about the landscape; cattle are abundant; and, as at Borgar, the inhabitants are all busy cutting and carrying the luxuriant rich grass from the marshes, where it thrives most in the vicinity of the thermal waters, as if their tepid precipitations fostered vegetation; the whole forms a most pleasing contrast to the arid, lifeless district we traversed yesterday, and the mournful desolation of Thingvalla.

Shortly after nine we halted on the banks of the lake, at the farm of Langadval; and extended on the grassy slopes of the "tun," on this soft, dreamy, autumnal morning, under the rays of a brilliant sun, I revelled in the lovely landscape, and soon forgot the dreadful weather of the previous week, and my miseries and disappointment at Snæfells Yökul. My eye alternately wandered from the saw-peaked and

gaudily-painted range under whose particoloured slopes we had hitherto wended our way, and which still extended towards the distant horizon, marking the direction of Geyser,—into the vivid green valley, with its rippling rivers, placid lakes, its heaven-supporting vapour-pillars, and the exquisite tints of the intervening ranges, which lay banked in picturesque confusion beneath the snows of Hekla and its ice-clad neighbours, standing out in chiselled relief against the intensely-blue sky. Imperceptibly yielding to these mesmeric influences, I slept soundly until noon, when my guide, having finished his gossip, felt inclined to advance.

Hugging the feet of the mountains, we pushed rapidly on: at one moment our ponies were up to their knees in the tall grass of the rich, lawn-like meadows—then we crossed the stony bed of a torrent on its way to mingle with the lake, or floundered through the edges of the morass, which occasionally extended itself from the valley amongst the forks of the gorges. Farm succeeded farm in rapid succession; in the numerous sheltered nooks cattle and horses were abundant, and peace and plenty seemed to reign in this, one of the best dairy districts in the island. But now the Bruará stops the way—foaming and snorting, it hurries along from the ice-region, in the heart of the mountains, through a lovely

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CROSSING THE BRUARÁ.

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glen, where dwarf birch and willow, and extensive patches of heather and moss, have established themselves on the decomposed surface of an old lava-field. Rich in hue and form, the glen contrasts agreeably with the undulating green carpet which it flanks. We forded the torrent a few yards above a considerable fall, by the aid of a narrow plank-bridge which spans a rent in the face, and about the centre of the lava-terrace, over which it precipitates itself. Altogether it was ugly work, the bed of the river on either side being very irregular, the bridge exceedingly fragile, and liable at any moment to be swept away. But the air was too elastic, and my spirits too buoyant, to think of going out of our way to the easier ford beneath; and with the help of a little persuasion, and leading the way, our clever ponies soon struggled out on the opposite bank. As for my guide, whom I had selected solely on account of his intelligence and good nature, the country, after leaving Thingvalla, was as new to him as to me throughout the journey; and I had subsequently to get a guide for him, at the fords of the larger rivers, and in crossing many of the marshes—neither of which are to be trifled with, from the constant changes they undergo.

At five, rounding a shoulder of the range, which trended abruptly northwards, we saw dense clouds of

vapour circling round the brow of the low hill which forms the north-eastern extremity of the peculiar oblong strip in which the geysers are situated: here the marsh, comparatively, terminates, and the country gradually rises to the level of the mountain range, bounding its northern sides, except in our immediate vicinity, where a narrow tongue of marsh extends along the mountain-chain, and finally separates it from what I shall term Geyser Island.

Another hour's ride, and we were traversing a peat and lava embankment, leading from the foot of the range, across this quaking strip of bog, to Geyser Island. Fording the stream which washes its eastern side, we ascended the mound at the southern shoulder of the hill, and came to a very neat farm lying about a quarter of a mile due south of the "Great Geyser."

As the evening was far advanced, I at once ordered out the smallest of the two tents generously left here by M. Gaimard for the benefit of the farmer and passing travellers—the former being allowed to make the very reasonable charge of a rix-dollar a day for its use during their stay. Leaving our ponies in the "tun," I cautiously traversed the ulcerated surface which intervened between the farm-house and the Great Geyser: its well-defined cone lying semi-detached under the hill on the north-eastern side of

the island. One moment I was carefully skirting the margin of a honeycombed cavity — its blue, boiling waters trickling away down the side of the slope to join others lower down; the next, I was passing the mouth of a funnel, in which the waters were violently agitated, but never rose to the surface. On all sides clouds of vapour were ascending, and from every orifice, steam, and sometimes small jets of water, escaped; or a slough of blue mud was bubbling and simmering, in the neighbourhood of which one was soon ankle-deep in hot clay. Passing the "Strokr," in violent paroxysms, I crossed the grass-plat which curiously intervenes, and, ascending its regularly-formed cone, stood on the edge of the basin of the Great Geyser, full to the brim, bubbling and seething in its centre, and heralding an approaching eruption by repeated subterranean detonations, which vibrated, not only through its immediate framework, but the surrounding soil.

The night looking angry, the first thing to be done was to get the tent up on the grass-plat within forty yards of the basin, dig a good trench round it, and place plenty of hay inside, so as to be ready for any eventuality. I confess I thought it tempting Providence establishing oneself so near the Geyser, for, if a strong northerly wind arose, we ought to have a steam-bath during an eruption, if nothing worse;

but there were traces of other encampments, and the farmer vouched for its good behaviour for past centuries; so I turned in to supper—milk, ptarmigan, and black bread—and arranged myself for the night, lit my ultimate pipe, and was endeavouring to reconcile Michelet's theory of the eternal youth of woman with the emaciated and meagre form of the farmer's wife, when the earth yearned under me to a wild detonating chorus from below. I scrambled out just in time to be enveloped in volumes of steam, and to hear the trickle of the waters which overflowed their limits; and had scarcely groped my way to windward of the basin, when in one frantic effort it belched forth its boiling bowels in a massive column about sixty feet in height, and, radiating at its climax, showered bouquets of water and vapour in every direction. Sinking in its tube apparently exhausted, the Geyser seemed eloquently to counsel me to follow its example and recruit my energies for the following day.

Geyser, September 9.—Towards morning we had one or two false alarms: our friend yearned in the spirit, groaned heavily once or twice, but was evidently not up to the mark, and as yet had not gathered together sufficient energy to shake off the superincumbent pressure, which may be likened to an eternal nightmare weighing on its bosom.

About four "Strokr" saluted the coming day with a violent, sustained, but irregular eruption, a sort of "feu de joie," which lasted thirty-seven minutes. It is a far more ornamental fountain than the Geyser, at least to my vision, springing from an irregular aperture a hundred paces south of its antagonist: also much more unpretending in appearance, possessing no cone, its mouth being on the same level with the surrounding surface, and a short-sighted man might walk into it with the greatest convenience; but its tube being much larger at the top than at the bottom, whilst that of the Geyser is almost perfectly regular, its showers radiate more gracefully, though they do not attain so great an altitude, and shiver into a perfect foliage of spray and steam.

As the violent eruptions of the Great Geyser seldom happen more than once in twenty or thirty hours, and Strokr will obligingly respond at any time to a dose of turf, I took my gun, killed a few couple of snipe in the adjacent marsh, and wandered on to Haukadal, a farm and church lying about three-quarters of a mile to the north on the rising ground celebrated as the scene of Are Frode's historical labours in the latter end of the eleventh century. He, the pioneer of history in the far north, commenced the Landnâmabok, and left several other monuments of his labours, which have unfortunately been lost.

The curate was, as usual, cordial and civil; and having negotiated the sale of a breast of mutton on the verge of the brine-tub, I made him pilot me to the so-called remains of St. Martin's Bath, on the banks of the river nearly abreast of his house. Here, from the centre of a large block of stone lying partly in the river, hot water used once upon a time to flow; at least so say traditions and the siliceous incrustation round the orifice; it now finds a vent in the middle of the river. Superstition endowed it with miraculous powers, and the halt and the leper, who were numerous in ancient days, gathered to it from all parts in the hopes of obtaining relief.

Wishing to discourse the priest relative to the local history and habits of the geysers, I invited him to an early dinner, and hastened home to prepare it. Whilst my guide went to purchase a bottle of corn-brandy and some coffee from the farmer, and beg him as the Squire to meet the Church, I undertook the office of Soyer, and determined to avail myself of the natural cooking resources of the country. I collected a considerable pile of turf at the mouth of the Strokr, and then, taking my reserve flannel shirt, packed the breast of mutton securely in the body, and a ptarmigan in each sleeve. On the approach of my guests I administered what I supposed would be a forty-minute dose of turf to the

Strokr, and pitched my shirt containing our dinner into it immediately afterwards.

Directing the guide to keep the coffee warm in the geyser basin, and seated "al fresco," I offered brandy and strips of dried cod by way of a relish —northern fashion. Not so contemptible either, I thought, as my memory carried me back to the hospitable board of a warrior prince, since murdered in the Caucasus, who always gave me, before breakfast, pickled onions and London gin out of a bottle bearing a flaunting label of a gaudy old grimalkin on a flaming scarlet barrel with golden hoops, and who, after drinking wine of every species, always wound up with bottled stout out of champagne glasses. The forty minutes passed, and I became nervous regarding the more substantial portion of the repast; and, fearing lest the Strokr had digested my mutton, ordered turf to be piled for another emetic. But seven minutes after time my anxiety was relieved by a tremendous eruption (the dinner-bell had sounded), and, surrounded with steam and turf-clods, I beheld my shirt in mid air, arms extended, like a head and tail-less trunk: it fell lifeless by the brink. But we were not to dine yet: so well corked had been the steam-pipe below, that it let out with more than usual viciousness, and forbade dishing up under Pain of scalding. After about a quarter of an

hour, in a temporary lull, I recovered my garment, and turned the dinner out on the grass before my grave guests, who immediately narrated a legend of a man in his cups who had fallen into the Strokr, being eventually thrown up piecemeal in the common course of events. The mutton was done to a turn; not so the ptarmigan, which I expected to be somewhat protected by their feathers; they were in threads. As for the shirt, it is none the worse, save in colour, the dye being scalded out of it.

From these local worthies I obtained but little information, except that the eruptions were more frequent and furious in a wet than in a dry season; and they were both of opinion that the geysers were nothing to what they were in their youth, and that the geyser service was going to the dogs. Towards four in the afternoon our colossal friend The Geyser again commenced to be uneasy; and at a quarter to six began to play in a feeble manner by fits and starts—sometimes attaining the height of seven or eight feet, but never more than five-and-twenty; and, after five minutes, subsided temporarily into its tube, apparently relieved.

CHAPTER XIV.

Early Icelandic notices of the geysers—Effects of earthquakes—Notices by travellers—*The* Geyser in eruption—Awe-inspiring scene—Water-power of the Island—Chemical construction of the geysers—Cause of detonations preceding eruptions—Cavern theory erroneous—Probable age of *The* Geyser—The Strokr compared with The Geyser—Artificial geysers practicable—Contemplated visit to Hekla.

REGARDING the antecedents of the Geysers, we find them mentioned in Norwegian history written nearly seven centuries since; but, singularly enough, there is no mention of them in Icelandic annals; and it is difficult to conceive such a minute histriographer as Are Frode living and dying hard by without taking some notice of them if they existed—which the chemical construction of the Great Geyser almost asserts. The first Icelandic notice we have of them is in the middle of the seventeenth century, by the then Bishop of Skalholt, who says *The* Geyser, evidently, from its more perfect form, the father of the family, erupted periodically every twenty-four hours; but in the accounts a hundred years later

this regularity of action ceased, and Olafsen and Povelsen[1] narrate how there were often three or four grand eruptions in the twenty-four hours, some attaining the height of upwards of 300 feet; and it is worthy of remark that they mention there was only one, *The* Great Geyser, in a state of activity. The proportions of its siliceous basin and pipe do not appear to have altered much. They made the average diameter of the basin 57 feet; depth of tube, 72 feet. The extensive earthquake of 1784 wrought great changes in the surrounding surfaces, but produced no visible effect on *The* Geyser. Our next account is from Von Troil, in 1772, who estimated the height of the column at 92 feet. Stanley followed in 1789, and gave 96 feet as the greatest height which it attained. He is the first to mention the old "Strokr," with a column often of 130 feet, rivalling its more substantial neighbour: it is now represented by an exhausted series of caverns, forming a reservoir of boiling water on the side of the hill, about forty yards due west of *The* Geyser. But an earthquake the same year destroyed its mechanism, and it shortly became perfectly tranquil. From the brink of its siliceous scaffolding, through its deep but brilliant blue waters, the mouth of the remaining portion of the tube may be distinctly traced. The same year the name Strokr, which

properly denotes a churn, and in its present sense means to agitate, was transferred to the fountain that at present bears it, and the Strokr then entered into a more active state, and became the noisiest of the crew. In fact, earthquakes have been constantly working changes in these steam and water vents, opening up some and closing others—*The* Geyser alone has maintained its ground, and merely accommodates itself to the amount of water and heat supplied. In 1804 *The* Geyser was most violent, erupting every six hours, at an altitude of over 200 feet, whilst the old Strokr, hard by, nearly reached the same elevation, and was of much longer duration.

Hooker and Mackenzie in 1809 and 1810 estimated these columns: the former at 100 feet, the latter at 90 feet, with an interval of thirty hours between each—the Strokr playing every ten or twelve hours, for about half an hour, at an altitude of 60 feet.

When visited by Henderson in 1815, *The* Geyser had again changed. Six hours was about the interval between the jets, which averaged about 80 feet in height; but he saw one of 150. The Strokr then generally played one hour in the twenty-four.

Since that time violent eruptions seldom occur oftener than once in thirty hours, and do not exceed 100 feet in altitude—generally averaging 70 or 80; and in the minor and more frequent jets, of which

there are often two in the same period, attaining about 30 to 50 feet.

As for the Strokr, it is excessively irregular in its movements, but will always respond when called upon.

September 10th.—Twice during the night I was aroused by the unearthly complaints of *The* Geyser; but beyond the vast clouds of vapour which invariably follow each detonation, and a gentle overflowing of the basin, they were false alarms. As morning was breaking it sounded an unmistakable "réveille," which would have roused the dead; and I had barely time to take up my position at the brink of the old "Strokr" before full power was turned on. Jet succeeded jet with fearful rapidity, earth trembled, and the very cone itself seemed to stagger under the ordeal. Portions of its sides, rent with the uncontrollable fury it had suddenly generated, were ripped off, and flew up in volleys, soaring high above water and steam, whilst the latter rolled away in fleecy clouds before the light north wind, and, catching the rays of the morning sun just glistening over the yökul-tops in the far east, was lustrous white as the purest snow.

Discharge succeeded discharge in rapid succession for upwards of four minutes, when, apparently exhausted, and its basin empty, I scrambled up to the

margin, intending to have a good look down the tube, which I imagined must also be empty; but the water was still within a few feet of the brink, and boiling furiously. Hastening back to my former position, the basin filled rapidly, and I was just in time to witness the most magnificent explosion of all. Everything seemed to depend on this superhuman effort, and a solid unbroken column of water was hurled upwards of 25 feet in circumference, attaining an altitude of very near 100 feet. Here the column paused for a moment before reversing its motion, and fell listless and exhausted through the volumes of vapour which followed it into its throbbing cup, again to undergo its fiery ordeal at the threshold of the infernal regions.

The beauties of this awe-inspiring scene could not appear to greater advantage than on such a clear crisp autumnal morning. Northwards the faultless domes of the inaccessible yökuls of the interior formed a broad contrast to the jagged blue peaks of Blafel; and Hekla, together with Eyafialla, scowled on the pigmy efforts of the lowlands in their vain endeavours to emulate their loftier brethren in the boiling floods which have often preceded their molten streams; whilst, in the valley beneath, man toils as if he were to live for ever, and, in happy confidence, builds his house on the verge of what may any day

prove his destruction, his cattle and sheep browsing on the hill, within a hundred yards of the noisiest eruption, without even deigning to look round.

Before entering into the chemical construction of geysers generally, and *The* Geyser in particular, whose mechanism is on a larger and more perfect scale than any of its contemporaries, it is necessary to consider the water-power of the island; one tenth part of which is encased in a perpetual envelope of ice, and the whole subject to excessive atmospheric deposition, either in the form of rain or snow—creating many lakes, marshes, and rivers. From the peculiar form of the island, a flat ascending arch which reaches its greatest elevation about the centre, its waters there diverge; and, endeavouring to gain a lower level in their oftentimes subterranean course, are diverted by dykes and fissures into deep volcanic ravines, there to be heated and evaporated by the volcanic soil. The waters, elevated by the combined force of elastic vapour and hydrostatic pressure, then break forth in thermal springs, whose frequent north-easterly direction corresponds with the volcanic line of activity which severs the island: at least, so say the chemists and geologists of the day who have investigated the matter; but I must take leave to observe, that in a pretty extensive acquaintance with Icelandic, so-

termed, thermal springs, I have never yet seen one where the water-power which supplied it was not apparent on the surface in the immediate vicinity; and I fully believe that, were the marsh pumped dry which borders this siliceous longitudinal geyser island, and if the river, which, dividing itself at its northern extremity, flows completely round it, were turned, so as to throw the geysers back on their supposed subterranean resources, they would be at once extinguished and lie dormant for want of water, as is the case with many of the other beds of geyserian formation which are scattered throughout the volcanic line. In proof of this I can assert my success in extinguishing a youthful bubbler near Reykholt church.

The presence of nitrogen, and absence of ammoniacal salts and organic matter, in these "thermal waters," is further adduced to prove their atmospheric origin; but does it not also prove that the water has not passed through those subterranean channels, and saturated itself with earthy particles through which it flowed? I am far from denying that such might be the source of a hot spring; but in Iceland thermal waters generally are the result of the surface currents meeting heated surfaces, or, as in the more immediate case before us, are, owing to certain peculiarities of the crust, enabled to create and destroy these wonderful natural fountains.

Situated twenty miles north-west of Hekla, and elevated 380 feet above the coast-line, this vast siliceous deposit is nearly five miles in length and three quarters of a mile in width, with its broadest part lying nearly north and south: the old rock which forms its base being palagonite, which here, as elsewhere, constitutes the basis of thermal activity in Iceland. The geysers lie towards its northern extremity under a clinkstone hill, from which warm waters and vapour escape at a considerable height above them: the neighbouring mountain range is composed of erupted trachytic clinkstone.

Here and there in the fumerole clay diminutive dark pools of viscid mud are bubbling, denoting the presence of small quantities of sulphurous acid, but to its absence generally we are indebted for the geyser system, which is caused by the combined action of carbonic acid, sulphureted hydrogen, and heated water on the substance of the palagonite; for in their mutual reaction exist all the elements requisite to convert, in the course of centuries, simple thermal springs into geysers.

As, in portraying the life of a hero, his lineage being duly acknowledged, the chronicles of the nursery are ransacked for those unmistakable evidences of his predestined greatness which the monthly nurse never fails to shadow forth, or the fond mother to

receive; so in the present instance, having discussed our hero's lineage, we will follow him — in youth, manhood, old age, and death. For though not built of clay, he is built of silica, and, like man, passes through all those phases of existence, but, with more forethought, on the day of his birth prepares the foundation of his tomb. In infancy it is the bubbling thermal spring; matured in years, the roistering geyser; old age creeping on, the tranquil "laug," light wreaths of vapour curling over the still simmering contents of its fairy azure grottoes, where it calmly awaits the fleeting of its once restless spirit, which is finally diverted amid the thunders of natural convulsion, leaving its sepulchral mound and ruined shaft as mementoes of its former vigorous existence.

Forcing its way through the palagonite foundation, our infant at once commences to raise its walls with the silica that, with the aid of the carbonic acid and sulphureted hydrogen, it has extracted from it, and which it deposits on the margin of its basin, projecting beyond the level of the water; thus the orifice of the spring, having no part in the incrustation, as it advances in years becomes converted into a deep tube. This, in its manhood, is gradually enclosed by a mound of siliceous tuffa, combining, when it has reached a certain height, all the requirements to convert it into a geyser. This long narrow tube

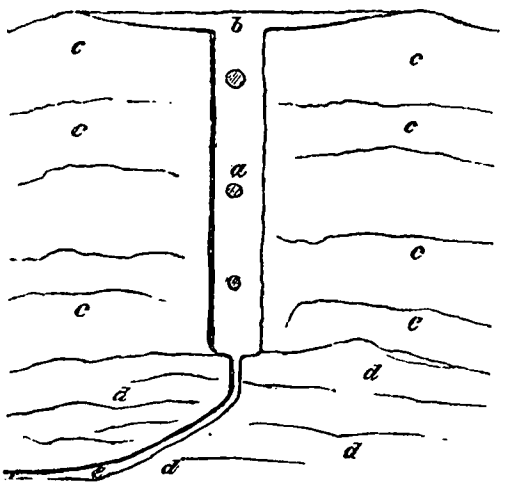
being filled, and constantly replenished, with a column of highly-heated water from below, a continuous geyser is a natural consequence—for this reason: though its waters originally might not have possessed a greater temperature at its mouth than that which would correspond to the pressure of the atmosphere, they may attain, towards the bottom of the tube, a temperature equal, within one or two degrees, to that at which water boils, under the additional pressure of a superincumbent column of water, as in *The* Geyser, where the temperature at 10 feet from the bottom of the tube, immediately preceding an eruption, is 125° C., gradually decreasing from below upwards, until within a foot of the surface, or 62 feet from the bottom, it is 83° C.

In the almost instantaneous generation of vapour at this excessively high temperature in the lower portions of the tube, lies the mechanical power of *The* Geyser; and the detonations which precede an eruption arise from large bubbles of vapour becoming suddenly condensed on rising to a cooler stratum of water near the surface, and may be termed abortive eruptions, being unable to propagate themselves beyond the point of origin, owing to the low temperature of the column. But when the superincumbent column can no longer offer an equilibrium to the rapidly-generating vapour, owing to the vast

amount of lateral heat evolved, its waters forced upwards overflow the basin, and consequently, in proportion, diminish the pressure at the boiling-point below, where the excess of temperature above that point is at once applied to the generation of steam, and the column forced higher, and the pressure consequently lessened, again developing more steam beneath; and after a few convulsive efforts it overpowers the remaining body of water, and striking it, so to speak, drives it upwards with all the violence with which it is endowed—the phenomena produced being a succession of explosions. Hence, according to the state of the atmosphere, the brusque irregular ascensions of *The* Geyser, and their duration more or less great—although, in general, they seldom last more than four or five minutes. In this contact with the atmosphere the water is cooled, and a portion falling back into the basin sinks into the tube, which gradually fills itself and basin, and the same process is repeated.

Its activity depends wholly on the supply of water, evaporation at surface, and meteorological influences, and its eruptions are finer after rain than before.

The diagram represents a sectional view of *The* Geyser tube and basin, imagining the former to be perfect in formation, which, from observation and sounding, may be assumed to be the case. Whether



it has at the present moment more than one source of water-power is of little importance. Originally it had but one, as in the diagram, where *e e* is supposed to represent a subterranean channel supplied with water from the river in the vicinity. This surface current has been diverted by some fault from its bed, and is now endeavouring to regain its level, impelled by great hydrostatic pressure. In so doing it finds an outlet up and through the heated palagonite crust, *d d*, supplying the water-power in the tube *a*, which has been constructed by its successive siliceous deposits, *c c*, whose foundations were laid on the day that the water first forced its way to the surface.

The water naturally enters the tube at a very high temperature, owing to the heated channel it traverses, but it is in the *tube* that it undergoes the heating process which terminates in eruption. At the base the column is heated by the throbbing mass of palagonite on which it rests; at its sides, from the great heat generated in the siliceous deposits.

The basin, *b*, has been worn in the surface of the incrustation by the heavy fall of water after each successive eruption: from its lips trickle the overflow, after the tube and basin are filled. The paucity of this overflow, coupled with the time the tube takes to fill, demonstrates the excessively small aperture through which it is supplied, and strengthens the probability that the original is the only one in existence.

• • • represent the masses of vapour generated under great pressure; condensed on arriving at the cooler stratum of water, they cause those reports which announce the impending explosion.

Such is a brief outline of geyser power, which lies wholly in the tube, where the heat stored up could generate, under ordinary atmospheric pressure, a column of steam having a section equal to that of the tube, and a height of nearly 1300 yards, and which is actually brought into action by the raising of the column and the lessening of the pressure. As for

the old hypothetical cavern, it has been abundantly demonstrated that the lower portion of the tube frequently takes no part in the violent commotions manifested during an eruption in its upper portion. Stones suspended near the bottom have not been ejected, and only those near the surface have been thrown to a great height. These, together with the observation that the mass of water propelled during an eruption beyond the margin of the basin corresponds perfectly with the depression of level that immediately follows, tend to prove the perfect formation of the bottom of the tube, and the necessity for the imaginary subterranean caldron ceases to exist.

If we now follow our hero on through his centuries of existence—that is, should he be spared from time to time by the violent earthquakes which shake the very foundations of his island-home, and which, at any moment, may dislocate the tube, or divert the supply of water—it is evident that the infinitesimal daily deposit, and consequent lengthening of the tube, must effect a change in the relation of the column of water and heat evolved from the ground; and as soon as the tube has reached such an altitude that the supply of heat from below and the cooling at the surface are so far in equilibrium that the temperature of the mass of water cannot anywhere

attain its boiling point, owing to increased pressure, our hero's occupation is gone, and though he may continue to deposit silica in the "laug" or cavern which he has created for himself, old age has put its veto on his energies, and he merely awaits the tender mercies of the first natural convulsion that may undertake his obsequies.

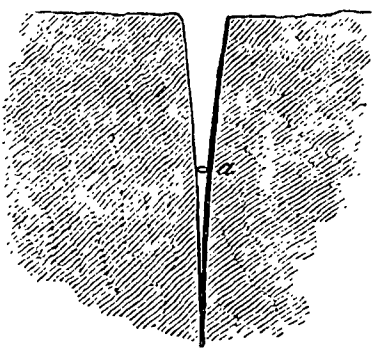
On entering the basin of *The* Geyser immediately after the eruption, I found it perfectly dry—indeed, such is its heat that it dries instantaneously; the tube was almost perfectly empty, its sides very regularly formed, but contracting about a third of the way down—its depth by measurement being 63½ feet, and its diameter at the mouth a little over eight feet. Its probable age may be roughly estimated at ten or eleven centuries, on the following grounds:—If you place a bunch of grass under a small fall, where the mass of the ejected waste water drains away into the river, in twenty-four hours it receives a coating of silica of about the substance of a very thin sheet of paper. Now, calculating 500 sheets of paper to the inch, and the height of the tube being 762 inches, it gives a probable age of 1036 years. And as we have no notice of this fountain in the earlier days of the colonization of the island 986 years ago, when its tube would have been only three feet deep, and consequently, its eruption being insignificant, it

would not have attracted attention; and as 436 years afterwards, when it would have acquired a depth of 26 feet and its eruptions must have been proportionably important, it is mentioned; considering the minute and accurate records kept by the early inhabitants, which are now before us in the Landnâmabok, this approximation may not be wholly inaccurate.

As for *The* Geyser water, it has no smell or disagreeable flavour whatever; but after being bottled some time it flies like ginger-beer, and smells strongly of sulphureted hydrogen. The petrifactions and incrustations which surround the basin are remarkably beautiful, but the former in many cases too delicate for removal: the surfaces of these depositions are not unlike a cauliflower in appearance, and in many places of considerable thickness. Vast mounds of geyserine formation are scattered in all directions, and may not inaptly be termed the tumuli of exhausted geysers.

Though in shape the "Strokr" differs considerably from the Geyser, its power also lies in the tube, which is funnel-shaped, having a depth of 48 feet, and a diameter of six feet at the mouth, but contracting at 22 feet from the bottom to only 11 inches, as shown in the diagram. Here in this narrow portion its steam is generated, and its premature action, brought on by stones or turf, is occa-

sioned by the mouth of the orifice *a* being closed, and that portion of the water being subjected to great heat, which it is unable to communicate to the main body, from which it is temporarily separated by the artificial barrier, and therefore is rapidly converted into superheated vapour, and overcomes the superincumbent pressure.



The action of either of these natural fountains may be illustrated by taking a metal tube, closing one end, filling it with water, and surmounting the other with a basin: if heat be applied beneath, and also near its centre, to imitate the lateral heating of the geyser-tube, eruptions will take place, and the system be exemplified; the discharged water cooled by the atmosphere falls back into the basin, and the tube being refilled the process is repeated. The artificial action of the Strokr may also be accomplished by gently stopping

the tube with a cork, which, together with the water, will be eventually ejected to a considerable height: in fact, there is no reason why an artificial geyser should not be added to the attractions of the Crystal Palace. As for the numerous other geysers in this immediate neighbourhood, they are all either in their infancy or old age—none are working sufficiently to be worthy of notice; though it is well to be cautious in threading your way amongst them, some squirting out obliquely, and the margins of many of the "laugs" being very treacherous. Having been exceedingly fortunate in the eruptions I had witnessed during my brief stay—for *The* Geyser is often very capricious, three days sometimes elapsing without its making any very great effort—I made up my mind for an early start to Hekla in the morning, intending, if possible, to accomplish the journey of sixty-two miles in the day, sleep at a farm called Selsunde, which lies at its foot, and subsequently make the ascent on the first fine morning; the view from its summit being extensive and panoramic; and besides I have always found that an elevated bird's-eye view is by far the best method of thoroughly comprehending the ramifications of a city or the distribution of a country. As to-morrow's route is almost impracticable, without a local guide, owing to the tortuous tracks through the marshes and the many

heavy rivers to be forded, I engaged a neighbouring farmer, made him sleep hard by, and, having the ponies' feet well looked to, turned them into the "tun," so as to ensure getting away the first thing in the morning.

CHAPTER XV.

GEYSER TO HEKLA.

Set out for Hekla — Churches of Skalholt and Holum — Beautiful situation of Skalholt — Fording a yökul river — Meet with a cavalcade — Dirty habits of the natives — Crossing the Thiorsá — Plain of Hekla — Quaint house-decoration — Preparation for the ascent — Description of Hekla — Growth of melur — Climbing the lava-stream — The snow-line — Lava streams of various ages — Reflections in the bowels of Hekla — Magnificent view from the summit — Perilous descent — Reach Storuvellir.

September 11*th.*—FOR once I succeeded in an early move, and was off before the sun was up, leaving the farmer to strike the tent. At first we were obliged for some miles to retrace our steps, as if returning to Thingvalla, before making across the marshes for Skalholt, near which we were to ford the Huitá, which derives it name from the same cause as its namesake at Borgar, but not with so much reason, its waters being much darker, though not less rapid and dangerous. Our ponies being very fresh after their two days' rest, and my new guide capitally mounted on one of the best "pacers" that I met in

this part of the country, we moved on rapidly in spite of the sponginess of the morass; and, after crossing numerous small rivers and traversing provokingly zigzag tracks, and oftentimes being obliged to invoke the aid and advice of the cottagers in these ever-changing sloughs, after a seven hours' struggle we arrived by ten o'clock at the church of Skalholt. It was famous during many centuries for the important part its bishops played in the early history of the island, dividing the episcopal honours with Holum in the north, from the establishment of Christianity, A.D. 1000, until 1797, when the Danish government amalgamated the two bishoprics, and the seat of jurisdiction was transferred to Reykjavik.* Skalholt is beautifully bedded in an undulating range, overlooking the junction of the Bruará and Huitá, backed by a magnificent amphitheatre of mountains, amongst which Hekla and the Eyafialla are the most prominent. The meadow-lands are very luxuriant, and speak well for that disinterested taste and far-seeing benevolence which in all climes and ages have

* The church at Holum is still in existence, being substantially built of a reddish sandstone, found in the vicinity, and, amongst other relics, contains a chalice and carved wooden altarpiece, representing the Crucifixion, a present from the Pope to the first bishop, whose portrait, with those of his successors, adorns the walls; and immediately in front of the altar is the marble tombstone of the first translator of the Bible into the vernacular—one Gudbrand Thorlakson, whose memory is deservedly revered by his compatriots.

characterised the humble followers of the Apostles. Report, no more to be trusted here than elsewhere, speaks of a massive cathedral in former days: be that as it may, there are no traces of it now, though an extensive burial-ground tells of a former population; the present church is small, of the ordinary wooden construction, and, together with three cottages, represents the site of the supposed ancient capital of the island.

Ascending the banks of the river, in some places of considerable height and precipitous, we came to comparatively lower ground, where the turbulent torrent having encroached became nearly a mile in width, and consequently much shallower, with several islands and shoals scattered on its surface. Here we forded, but not without much difficulty; my friend the farmer and his pony having a considerable swim in one of the channels, where, swerving a few feet out of the right direction from the strength of the stream, he went heels over head out of his depth, and was instantly swept away by a four or five mile current. For some time I was uneasy about him; but sticking to his pony he eventually gained the bank a good quarter of a mile below us, and seemed rather pleased than otherwise at so good an excuse for incessant pulls at his brandy-horn,—a silver-mounted one, jauntily

hung over his shoulder with a chain of the same material, and of which he was uncommonly proud. As the temperature of this yökul river was very little under the freezing point, he was perhaps not far wrong.

My guide's Brandy-horn.

Half an hour of this doubtful work and we were scrambling up the banks on the opposite side, and shortly arrived at a large farm, where, finding they had that morning made a good haul of salmon out of a pool a little lower down, we made a most undeniable breakfast.

After a tedious ride we arrived by five on the banks of the Thiorsá, having traversed alternately mountain and morass, but met with no object of interest, save a caravan from the neighbourhood of Seiders Fiord on the east coast, famous for the abundance of Iceland spar found in its vicinity, a crystal remarkable for its double refractive powers and used for lenses. The cavalcade consisted of twenty-seven ponies, three

adults, and two children, with plenty of baggage, provisions, and three tents; for in these nomadic trips they are often obliged to depend wholly on themselves, especially when crossing any portion of the interior.

Arriving at the ferryman's house, we were welcomed by a bevy of children—alone requiring soap and water to render them perfectly beautiful—followed by their mother, whose innate grace and mien shone through her tattered rags, as, courteous and dignified, she begged us to enter, with a smile that would have softened a nation. The antecedents of this exotic I could not unravel; that she was earthly her family testified, but I never could have believed she was Icelandic. Fearing to hurt her feelings by offering to pay for our coffee, which I always made a point of insisting on, I gave each of the children a small silver bit; they all retired to the kitchen to consult their mother, and returned with the unanimous intention of bestowing the accustomed kiss that here invariably follows the receipt of a present, and, were it not for the natural dirty defence which garnishes all lips, might be sometimes somewhat dangerous; but I evaded this ordeal under the plea that I feared my grisly beard might be disagreeable.

After considerable delay, caused by our having to

send for the ferryman, who was helping a neighbour to get his hay in, we moved down to the ferry, and, selecting the best of three rickety boats, launched her and commenced our crazy transit over the deepest, broadest, and most rapid river in the island—nearly 200 miles long; it takes its source in the Sprengisandr, and receives from numerous tributaries the melted snows of the eternal ice regions of Hofs, Skaptar, Vatna, and Torfa yökuls. Our ponies did not at all like the prospect of the half-mile swim across this black angry current, but, after many false starts under volleys of stones from the ferryman's urchins, we dragged them out of their depth, and, towing them astern with compressed nostrils and dilated eyeballs, we made for a bight nearly a mile down on the opposite side. No one could afford to be idle; the ferryman managing the ponies astern with great dexterity, the farmer and myself pulling, and the guide baling, for our bark was very leaky: altogether I was happier when we landed, not far from a very awkward fall, to the brink of which we were rapidly hastening, but we were swept into an eddy just as a few seconds more would apparently have ensured an interview with Davy Jones. Once on the eastern bank, we were fairly on the plain from which Hekla takes its rise, still distant some fifteen or twenty miles: galloping over rich undulating grass-lands, through

which cropped out the jagged peaks of the lava-field on which it was superimposed; and disturbing several flocks of wild geese who had made it their feeding ground, we reached Skara about seven. This church and farm lay under a black range of cones immediately facing our destination, now entirely obscured by mist, the intervening space being a strange agglomeration of grass-land, lava, sand, and scrub. Storuvellir we left far away on the right, standing well out in the plain. Travelling here was comparatively easy and good, and our ponies appreciated it, stepping out well in spite of the fatigues of a day in which we had nearly accomplished a double journey. In the sandy districts I saw a good deal of melur* growing: its seeds are much appreciated, and, besides being eaten raw, are made into porridge, and thin cakes not unlike a bannock. We had yet another river to cross, the Rangaa, which runs under the foot of Hekla on its western side: beautifully clear and transparent, we could distinguish the rugged irregular lava-bed over which it flowed. Here and there the peaks of the lava projected above the stream and rendered its passage both difficult and dangerous, and we had to await a guide from the farm on the opposite side; in fact, during the greater part of this day I was obliged to take a guide for the guide.

* Elymus arenarius.

J. W. Bushby

HEKLA, FROM THE BANKS OF THE RANGAA.

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Selsunde, the hamlet where we were to pass the night, was still two hours distant, lying under the southern slopes of the mountain, and I was half inclined to halt here, as the farm was a pattern of neatness and order, its owner evidently no ordinary man. He had decorated the entire front of his house with mutton-bones, arranged in all manner of quaint tesselated forms, and they, well bleached by incessant rains, had a far from unpleasing effect on the green sods with which it was faced. In the yard, in utter contempt of mystic lore, were two large blocks of obsidian or Iceland agate, which is found in great quantities near Torfa Yökul, at about a day's journey from hence; the common belief being that you have only to place a piece of Hráfntinna (obsidian) on a farm to cause all the inhabitants to quarrel. Traversing an extensive water-worn and barren surface, in which were numerous deep black volcanic sand-drifts, we rode up between two lofty and antique lava-streams, frowning at one another across the valley, and forming ramparts from forty to fifty feet in height, that seem to have halted out of mutual respect and deference to the verdant valley between them, and at the head of which lies Selsund, wonderfully well sheltered, though in a somewhat dangerous neighbourhood. The accommodation offered was so wretched, that

I rigged up an impromptu tent with my waterproof sheet in the bed of the half-finished hayrick, and never slept better in my life; perhaps an eighteen hours' ride had something to do with it.

Sept. 12*th.*—The day broke wet and cloudy, but I had had too much experience of Icelandic weather not to make every preparation for the ascent, ready for a sudden improvement. The farmer whom I had hoped to employ as guide being at Nœfrholt, a hamlet more immediately under the summit, and consequently so much nearer the seat of action, I procured another pony, and, leaving my former guide and ponies to follow in the evening, started at four o'clock. An hour and a half's ride under the semi-detached cones which form a sort of rampart to the southern flanks of the mountain, brought me to Nœfrholt just in time to catch the farmer starting on a hay-making expedition with his entire family. Directly he became aware of my wishes he readily agreed to accompany me; whilst he is catching his ponies, his boy rummaging out some old Hekla stocks, and his wife vainly searching for a pair of spiked shoes in the family storehouse, amongst a motley-looking heap of dried fish, old mocassins, sugar-candy, decrepit spindles, woollen yarn, half-dressed sheepskins, and stockings whose soles had

long since departed, I may as well introduce the reader to the mountain and its environs.

Situated about thirty miles from the coast, on the margin of an extensive plain, and completely isolated from the adjacent ranges on its eastern side, Hekla is not very remarkable, either from its height or picturesqueness, and mainly owes its world-wide reputation to the frequency of its volcanic eruptions. They average about three in a century; some have continued for six years without intermission. The intervals average about thirty-five years, but the discharges are by no means regular; the longest known period of volcanic rest never extended over more than seventy years. Its form is that of an oblong cone, about twenty miles in circumference, lying in the direction of the volcanic line, and it is about 5000 feet in height; the snow at this time of the year extending about two-thirds of the way down the sides, which are chiefly composed of slag, ashes, scoria, and pumice. Its lava-streams have nearly all flowed towards the west and south-west; the craters being on its western face, none towards the east, the numerous small cones around the southern slopes having jointly produced the extensive field of lava which lies to the south; the more modern streams have nearly all flowed to the west, where layer upon layer is piled up in the space

intervening between the mountain and the banks of Rangaa; some have circled round its northern base—the whole presenting a confused mass of several square miles in extent. There can be little doubt that in former times it covered the entire plain on the western bank of the river, and subsequently superimposed the ashes and sand, now in some places converted into soil, but amongst which the more elevated crags and peaks still protrude.

It was seven before the farmer declared his readiness to start. We then moved off uncommonly well mounted, as there were yet about four miles we could ride before the arduous portion of the ascent commenced, each carrying a bottle of milk and some biscuit, and a short staff shod with a strong spike for ice-work. For a mile and a half we were rambling along the patches of green grass-land that skirted the cones and ash-hills, separating us from the southern slope of the mountain; then we entered a narrow gorge in the range, through which the melting snows had forced an exit, and found ourselves in an extensive amphitheatre, for the most part floored with old grey moss-grown lava, but here and there luxuriant patches of grass on which a few sheep were feeding. A dilapidated hut stood hard by, used as a temporary residence whilst gathering the hay, on which a high value was evidently set, for a wall extended

across the gorge to keep the cattle out; as for the sheep, to restrain them is impossible, they will jump anything. Replacing the two poles which barred the entrance, we seemed to shut out mankind, and enter the threshold of the tormented, whose home superstition has placed in the gloomy realms beneath, where Hela superintends their torture, and may sometimes be seen leading troops of infernal spirits laden with the doomed down the crater into the abyss beneath, returning back for more. This, says the chronicler, is generally observed after a bloody battle has been fought in some place or another; but one thing is certain, especially interesting to ornithologists—gigantic ravens, with iron bills, are ready to do battle with all intruders who may dare to enter this wild domain, and escape the burning sulphur, steam, fire, and flames, with which its precincts are surrounded.

Escaping from the valley, where red precipitous hills frowned on us from all sides, we commenced a very gradual ascent over an undulating white sandy track. Here the melur grew even more luxuriantly than on the plain we passed yesterday, and certainly seemed like matter out of place, springing as it did from the white volcanic sand, on all sides surrounded by lavas and ashes, devoid of the faintest traces of vegetation. Curious to know how it got there,

and having my doubts as to its being wild, in consequence of observing that it always grew on the summit of little sand-cones, I asked my friend the farmer; he said it was planted there on account of the warmth and shelter. This species of grass has the appearance of rye, for which some travellers have mistaken it. The peasants gather it in August, but being seldom ripe it requires to be dried before it can be used. In Myrdals, where it grows more abundantly, the inhabitants not only provide themselves with meal from this source, but send it to other parts of the island. This in a measure explains away the rumours that are circulated relative to the climate having formerly been much milder than at present: an assertion mainly supported by the fact of this grass, often called rye, having been more extensively grown in former days, but no longer necessitated from the increased facilities of obtaining grain from Europe.

However, it is now time to tie our ponies tail to head, and cross on foot a branch of the 1846-growth lava, the last eruption; and very disagreeable work it is—sharp and vitrified, it not only cuts up our mittens, but hands likewise in a most unmerciful manner, as we climb the angular surface and scramble from crag to crag. About a quarter of a mile of this, and we descend to the black sand and cinder slope of the mountain itself, and the regular ascent commences along the flank of the lava-stream.

The day seems inclined to mend, but the mist clings to the mountain-top, though all is sunny below. Our route lies in an oblique ascending direction, on its western face, directly leading up to the mouth of the 1846 crater, which has broken out in the side, about a sixth of the way down, and is perfectly distinct from those near the summit, though apparently in direct communication with the source of the more modern streams. At ten o'clock, when about two-thirds of the way up, we enter within the limits of the snow-line, which is a great relief, as the freshly-fallen snow offers a firm footing, whereas in the sand we sank ankle-deep at every step. The ascent now became so steep that we had to advance in a zigzag, but, being fair walkers, another hour brought us to the mouth of the 1846 crater, or rather to the vent of the 1846 lava, which broke out of the side of the mountain, as it sometimes does out of Vesuvius, but in far greater volume: this funnel-shaped aperture was about 150 feet deep, and well bedded with ice on its lower side. In descending, the farmer leading, we were some time in utter darkness, until light suddenly broke in through a fissure near the bottom, at which we made our exit. There was not the slightest trace of heat about this portion of the mountain, but from the old crater under the southernmost of the three cones which form the summit light

wreaths of vapour were ascending. Halting here, the different streams of lava could be distinctly traced, and their age was almost written on them, as with the imaginary port wines of commerce: first, at our feet came the promising '46, red and full bodied, the newest of the batch, and that fourteen years old, not a very luxuriant growth, scarcely extending more than seven miles; next came the '66, '68, ninety-four years old, the produce of a very remarkable year, a light and tawny ditto; beyond that the 1754, a delicate and crusted ditto, strongly recommended; and in the distance the 1728—not much of this left, a very choice old ditto ditto, well coated over with moss and lichens; the others, which swept away in heedless confusion towards the river, being confounded beyond all hopes of identity.

Retracing our steps, we resumed the ascent once more, and at noon stood on the brink of the crater —the eastern side of which forms part of the southern cone. It is nearly circular, about half a mile in circumference, and from two to three hundred feet deep. The recently-fallen snow still lay in some parts; but by far the greater portion was bare and fuming. Its sides were a strange mixture of black sand, ashes, clinkstone, and sulphur-clay—more water was alone wanting to develop its slumbering energies. Descending to the bottom, which con-

tracted almost to a point, I was somewhat surprised to find it of a hard black mud on one side, supporting a considerable mass of ice—a strange contrariety to its steaming flanks, in which, about half way down, near some precipitated sulphur, I had by digging away the crust succeeded in lighting a fusee, and subsequently my pipe; and, choosing a temporary fire-proof seat, endeavoured to realize my position in the bowels of Hekla. Like nearly all realities, it barely comes up to the anticipation; but when I reflected that it has continued the steady work of destruction through nine centuries, during which there are authentic records of no less than twenty-four periods of violent eruptions of various duration; and that the last but one, in 1766, was as devastating as any of its predecessors—destroying surrounding farms and pastures with its lava and ashes, hurling its red-hot stones to an almost fabulous distance, and powdering the southern and central districts with layers of sand, some of which even reached the Faroes; I felt that I had uncourteously underrated its powers, and to its moderation alone should I be indebted for my return. Not so the farmer, who shook his head at my scoffings, for he had lost both property and ancestors in its unceremonious outbreaks. Obliged to return by the way we had entered—the other sides of the crater being too precipitous—we traversed the steep narrow

ledge of its northern side. Our position was anything but reassuring; the footing was loose and rickety, and only fit for a chamois; a precipice on either hand, down which the displaced rubbish—especially on the northern side, which is for the first 1000 feet very little out of the perpendicular—rolled with ominous velocity. Nearing the summit, we caught sight of the other two cones, and, making up the centre one, stood on the top of the mountain, which is about a quarter of a mile in length from N.E. to S.W., and eighty yards across. Here I could distinguish no other crater; but there was a great deal of drift snow between the cones, which very probably may have hidden one of its old vents. Towards the N.E. the mountain sloped away gradually, as on its S.W. side; but the eastern face was even more abrupt than any, being nearly perpendicular for the first 3000 feet.

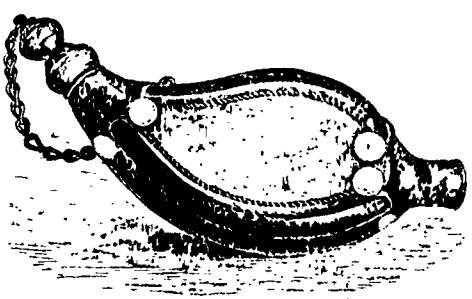
One could not fail to enjoy the magnificent and extensive view encircling this vitreous volcano, and which never shone to greater advantage than to-day, when a light north wind had carried the mountain-mists to sea, and a brilliant sun warmed peak and valley, and even imparted a genial aspect to those distant yökuls which the clearness of the atmosphere had transported to my feet. Away in the north-west the massive column

of my old friend *The* Geyser seemed to bid farewell as it modestly rose in spotless white against the neutral-tinted slags of Bjarnarfell. In the interior of the island, of which we saw more than half way across, Lang and Hofs Yökuls' icy blue domes glittered in the sunshine, and backed the verdant valley of the Thiorsá, with its hundred silvery tributaries leading up the gorge into the "Sprengisandr," where the track crosses the desert to the northern coasts. Here and there patches of Iceland "forest" darkened the valley, and irregular groups of heather-blooming hills were conspicuous in their harlequin colours, whilst the resolute-looking Bláfell rose abruptly from the plain to the height of 2500 feet, and marked the confluence of the Huitá with the lake that gives it birth. To the north-east, beyond that vast chain of lakes (Fiskivötn), is Skaptar Yökul, the most terrible of its contemporaries —that is, in the memory of man—scowling over its ravages, where in one gigantic effort it destroyed twenty villages, over 9000 human beings, and about 150,000 sheep, cattle, and horses—partly by the depredations of the lava and noxious vapours, and in part by famine, caused by showers of ashes and the desertion of the coasts by the fish. Beyond those interminable ice regions are the untrodden Vatna and Klofa Yökuls, which never have been, and I

believe never can be, penetrated by man. Here, Alpine Club, is a field worthy of your ambition; but which will sorely try your metal, when, beyond the help of Coutets and Balmâts, you must trust solely to your individual nerve and cunning. Close at hand, due east, lies Torfa Yökul, only separated by a furrowed valley, in which are numerous narrow lakes, all in the same parallel volcanic line. Towards the southward, Tinfialla and Eyâfialla limit the view, and meet the ocean, on whose unruffled surface the abrupt basaltic cliffs of the Westmann islands are clearly defined, although fifty miles distant. In the plain betwixt us and the sea the three peaks of the Thrihyrningr stand conspicuous: this mountain and its neighbourhood figure in the famous Najáls Saga, which tells of a peaceful father and his pugnacious sons. Beyond, where the Thiorsá joins the Hversfliot, stands Oddi, once the home of Sæmundr the Learned, who has the credit of having kindled this volcano, and into whose history we will dive at a more convenient period. Far west, the fretted ranges extending from Thingvalla and the coast mark the position of Eyrarbacka, towards the limits of the intervening valley—the whole forming a panoramic view unsurpassed either for interest or beauty, being one of the most extensive and varied of any in the world. Whether we consider

the unique character of this island-pandemonium of volcanoes, or ramble from the awe-thrilling powers of Skaptar to the more delicate mechanism of that matchless natural fountain, or the dogged energies slumbering beneath our feet, we wander into the realms of hidden causes, and, alike bewildered and bewitched, are more than ever convinced of our nothingness—for if there be sermons in stones, volumes are unopened here. But my mortality is getting cold; light fleecy vapours descend and are drawn round the summit, and I am lounging on the snow in a light Tweed shooting-suit, half fascinated with scenes which would alone have repaid a trip to the far north. My eyes look their last, and swim in a vain attempt to embrace the whole. The descent commences, always "en glissade," whether over snow or sand; and my friend the farmer, thinking he would like to do the same, having no grip with his mocassins, was soon making headlong tracks for the lava-field beneath, whilst I with bated breath quivered for the result, and was inexpressibly relieved when he brought up in a snow-drift a few yards from total destruction. Regaining our ponies, which, by the trail, had evidently been motionless during our absence, we reach Nœfrholt at five o'clock, after a rapid ride, where, finding my guide ready, and my ponies thoroughly refreshed, we galloped across the

plain to Storuvellir, arriving at half-past eight, so as to be well advanced for an early start to Reykir (Little Geyser) in the morning. I was courteously received by the clergyman, whose manners and mode of living were far above the average, and he cordially responded to the passport with which the good rector of Reykholt had furnished me, directing all his brethren to aid and assist the bearer. Having nothing else to do, I now propose to take a bird's-eye view of the volcanic history of the island, and of the world-renowned Skaptar Yökul in particular.



Snuff-box.

CHAPTER XVI.

VOLCANIC HISTORY OF ICELAND.

Gradual decrease of grass-lands — Contemporaneous inundations of boiling water and ice — Theory of the boulders — Kötlugiâ Yökul — General convulsions of 1775 — Devastations in Iceland — Eruption of Skaptar Yökul in 1783 — Fearful scène of ruin — Deteriorating effects on the Norse islanders of the volcanic ravages — Strength of family ties.

THERE can be little doubt that the grass-lands of Iceland have been considerably diminished since its colonization, through the combined effects of fire and water—each under several different phases. In looking at the map, we see vast yökuls scattered in every direction; but more especially in the south-eastern districts, where the extensive conglomeration of ice termed Vatna and Klofa Yökuls,—of which Breidamark, Orœfa, Sida, Skeidará, Skaptar, and others of minor importance, are mere outposts,—occupy a space of no less than 3000 square miles, at an elevation varying from 6000 to 3000 feet. This mass of ice may be said to rest on the elevated cones and fissures of a nest of dormant volcanoes. The peculiar

shapes and substance of these trachyte mountains are singularly adapted to collect and retain the snow that forms the basis of the yökul; and, with the aid of the sun and a northern climate, it is speedily converted into ice. These yökuls go on increasing in bulk until one or the other of the following causes comes into operation, either equally tending to the same result—namely, the encroachment on, and destruction of, the grass-lands and farms at their base. The accumulation of pressure, assisted by gravity, causes the lower portions of the yökul to seek an outlet in the gorges and ravines which skirt the mountain: immense glaciers are consequently formed, and ever impelled by the above causes down the slopes into the plains beneath, where, owing to the low temperature, the volume of these ice-rivers is but little impaired: thus they stalk out on the plains, rooting up the pasture-lands, and in the early summer pouring forth impassable torrents from their extremities. Again, whenever the sub-glacial volcanoes resume their activity, as was the case in the above-mentioned district in the fourteenth century, when all its vents burst into a state of activity—paradoxical as it may seem—floods of boiling water and ice inundated the surrounding country, sweeping everything before them, and some-

times forming those travelling glaciers of which the Breidamark and Skeidará are the most gigantic examples. The former is not so much a mountain as a vast field of ice—about 20 miles in length, 15 in breadth, and 400 feet in height—occupying what was, previously to the fearful catastrophes of the fourteenth century, a fertile and well-inhabited plain. Here vast masses of ice, detached from their lofty layers by the sudden generation of heat, are borne down on the floods from the boundless resources of the yökul range, and, stranded on the plain, have gradually accumulated and consolidated, together with a mass of débris imparting a greyish hue to the whole, which, from glacial causes and the configuration of the land, is gently advancing towards the sea.

The extraordinary part these deluges of water and ice have played in excoriating the surface of the country in the neighbourhood of the yökul ranges, together with the immense blocks of lava and detritus that they have borne down into the plains, have induced passing travellers to consider themselves on the traces of the "glacial epoch;" and they appeal to the "boulders" scattered in these ice-furrowed districts in support of their argument: whereas these so-termed "boulders" are nothing

more than detached masses of lava-rock existing in the vicinity. Although Oræfa Yökul, the highest in the island (7000 feet), distinguished itself in 1727 by a frightful exundation previous to its eruption, when it hurled ice-blocks into the sea, and the very ice-mountain itself ran down into the plain, sweeping everything before it, I prefer to illustrate the important part these aqueous agencies have played by considering the exundations of Kötlugiâ Yökul, which forms a portion of the yökul block to the S. W. of Hekla. It has distinguished itself by no less than eight of these hot-water exundations since the colonization, in all cases characterized by the prodigious volume of hot water emancipated; and which, from the rapidity of its circulation, was more to be dreaded than the stately fire-floods themselves. Its eruption in 894 is the first record we have of similar phenomena in the island. But it was reserved for its last effort to exceed all previous ones, and it apparently then exhausted itself, as it has now been tranquil for more than a century.* The year 1775 was distinguished by the almost universal volcanic convulsions which shook the foundations of Europe, and reverberated in Asia, Africa, and America —Lisbon particularly was left a heap of ruins. Nor was it to be expected that Iceland should not respond to

* This summer it has burst out again.

this terrestrial pulsation; and on the 17th of October the primitive inhabitants around Kötlugiâ, who had dwelt in a doubtful volcanic peace for thirty-five years, were warned of their impending fate by violent earthquakes, quickly followed by the boiling waters set in motion by the rapidly-developing internal heat of the mountain, which, melting the lower portions of its icy coverings, floated off vast masses of the superincumbent glâciers. Sweeping everything before them, these ruthless floods completely overflowed Myrdalsand, bearing down masses of ice and rock, the former resembling young yökuls in dimensions. Fifty farms—soil, houses, churches, stock, and owners—were literally carried out to sea, and a shoal formed of the débris. The air was filled with smoke, and it rained ashes, enveloping the adjacent country in total darkness. The wretched survivors found themselves denuded not only of their goods and chattels, but the very soil on which they depended for subsistence was torn from them, and an unproductive waste of sand, gravel, and lava-blocks substituted for their homes and pastures, as if the demon of destruction were not satisfied with their ejection, but had determined to improve them off the face of the earth.

To exemplify the ravages of the fiery elements vomited by the yökuls after they have burst their

icy canopy and deluged the surrounding country, I may narrate the eruption of Skaptar Yökul in 1783, by far the most violent and extensive of any—and there have been many of which we have record. We saw it yesterday from the summit of its faithful ally, Hekla—a worthy outwork of that infinite volcanic region encased in ice before alluded to, and which may be very properly considered as one general volcano with many vents. It takes its name of Skaptar from a river at its feet, down which the greater part of the lava poured.

After an unusually mild winter and spring, the approaching catastrophe was ushered in towards the end of May by a flourish of earthquakes, when the whole southern coast was violently agitated, and the island of Nyöe was thrown up off Cape Reykianæs, nearly 200 miles from the scene of devastation which followed. Towards the 8th of June the inhabitants of the West Skaptarfell Syssel became more and more alarmed at the violence of the earthquakes in their vicinity: prognosticating some violent volcanic paroxysms, they abandoned their dwellings, took to their tents, and, bewildered, awaited the result, unable to tell in what direction the danger would burst forth; but on the 8th their awful suspense was relieved, though not their fears. Vast

columns of smoke arose in the vicinity of the yökul, ashes and pumice were borne down in showers on the strong north gale, and immense quantities of ice were melted, causing the rivers to overflow their banks. Two days afterwards the eruption burst forth with an infernal fury which seemed to threaten the end of all things: flames blazed amongst the clouds of smoke; a torrent of lava, flowing towards the river Skaptar, after a short struggle dispossessed it of its bed, and, cut off from its resources, it became dry in less than twenty-four hours; the lava, collecting in the mountain channel—in many places 400 to 600 feet deep and 200 broad—not only pursued its uncontrollable course towards the sea, but in many places overflowed the banks, destroying everything that came in its way, and, on joining the low fields of Medalland, wrapped the entire district in molten flames. Old lavas underwent fresh fusion and were ripped up and lacerated by the streams which penetrated their subterranean caverns; fiery floods succeeded one another in rapid succession; numerous streams were diverted at each favourable point; and the entire country deluged at one time or another with molten masses. Towards the beginning of July the lava-stream again resumed the channel of the Skaptar, and, pouring over the lofty cataract of Stapfoss, filled the profound

abyss beneath, which the waters had been ages in excavating, and finally was arrested at Kyrkjubæ church, near the junction of the river with an arm of the sea.

The molten current had so long confined itself to the course of the Skaptar and country near which it flowed, that the inhabitants in the eastern portions of the Syssel, on the banks of the Hverfisfliot, hoped to escape without the total destruction of their lands and homes, although showers of red-hot stones and ashes had obliterated every vestige of vegetation; but their time was not yet come. Buried in successive clouds of smoke and ashes, they lingered on in hope until the 3rd of August, when a thick vapour rising from their river warned them of the coming destruction. That stream speedily dried up, making way for the foaming fiery flood, which, driven from its original course, after having choked up all the outlets in the north and west, swerved round Mount Blœngr, adopted the bed of the Hverfisfliot, and, flooding the surrounding country, rolled on to the sea at its entrance. About the end of the month, the lava supply being somewhat exhausted, these red-hot floods halted and solidified; but in the immediate vicinity of the yökul they still poured forth in unabated fury at irregular intervals until February in the following year, when its energies gradually

died out, and columns of smoke alone marked the source of all this misery. The molten streams did not cool for upwards of two years; and an idea of their dimensions may be formed from the fact that the one which flowed down the Skaptar was about fifty miles in length, and twelve and fifteen broad in the low country, where its height did not exceed 100 feet, whilst in the narrower parts of the channel it rose to five and six hundred. The Hverfisfliot branch was about forty miles in length, and seven at its utmost breadth; and when it is considered that this merely represents that portion which flowed into the inhabited districts, whilst in all probability an equal, if not a greater portion, was heaped up at the base of the crater, and in the unknown districts by which it is environed; and if we also take into consideration the pumice, sand, and ashes scattered not only over the whole island, where the greater portion of the pasture was at least temporarily destroyed, but hundreds of miles round, even causing the destruction of the fisheries on the coast—twice the volume of Hekla would hardly represent the matter ejected. During this awful visitation, men, cattle, houses, and churches, in the immediate vicinity, were actually burnt up by the insatiable lava-floods that poured down the hill-sides with fearful rapidity, and everything which could tend to support the

life of man or beast perished; noxious vapours filled the air, and all living creatures yielded to famine and its concomitant diseases. The cattle, deprived of their pasture destroyed by the ash-showers, died by thousands; and, denuded of his only other means of subsistence—fish, man perished also. No wonder, then, that after many such ordeals these once vigorous Norse islanders should have deteriorated. That they have survived at all is a matter of astonishment; for many have been their trials through plague, pestilence, and famine—fire and water dealing out death alternately. Nor is it easy to imagine a more awful visitation than when, enveloped in almost total darkness by the clouds of smoke and ashes, and half-suffocated by the noxious gases emitted, unable to see in what direction to flee for safety, they were left for days and weeks in sickening conjecture as to their fate; until, actually unearthed by fiery or boiling floods, escape was almost impossible; and, bound together by those domestic ties which are nowhere more intensely developed than on Icelandic hearths, the strong and the weak were alike hurried into the future.

CHAPTER XVII.

OF SÆMUNDR THE LEARNED.

Sæmundr's birth and education —Instructed abroad in occult arts — Forgets his name and country — Rescued by the Saint Jón — Returns to Iceland — Sæmundr in the School of the Black Art — Outmatches the devil — Betrothed to a wise-woman — His swearing farm-servant — His milkmaid beguiled — How Sæmundr obtained power over fiends — The maid and the magic pipe — The devil at mass — Rhyming challenge — The wishing-time — His wife Gudrum — Icelandic winter-evenings — Natural thirst for knowledge.

AMONGST the distinguished literary Icelanders who flourished in the earlier and more interesting period of their history, none enjoy greater celebrity than Sæmundr, surnamed Fródi, or the Learned. Born at Oddi, in Iceland, in 1056, he was educated in England, and subsequently studied in French and German universities; but eventually was persuaded to return to his island home by his relative, Bishop Ogmundson, who was travelling in the southern countries. On arrival in Iceland he took orders, and was nominated to the living of Oddi, which village had been in the possession of his family ever since the coloniza-

tion of the island. It occupies a portion of the fertile plain traversed by the Markarfliot, and is situated about twenty miles south of Hekla. He established a school, and became conspicuous from the interest he took in the education of those around him, as well as from his fondness of the legendary lore of his country. He likewise composed several literary works, none of which, however, have been handed down, save the poetic, or Elder Edda, which is commonly known by the name of Sæmundr's Edda, to distinguish it from the prosaic portion of the Edda, attributed to Snorro Sturleson, who passed many years under the tuition of Sæmundr's grandson.

The Elder Edda consists of thirty-nine poems, chiefly collected from oral tradition, some few from manuscript. They embrace the entire system and superstition of Scandinavian mythology—the creation, the origin of man, how evil and death came into the world, and conclude by predicting the destruction and renovation of the universe, and describe the future abodes of bliss and misery. The Sólar-ljód (Solar lay) is the only one composed by Sæmundr himself, and was probably written to show that, notwithstanding his love of heathen literature, he was a good Christian.

To the enlightened research of this studious antiquarian parson of the eleventh century we are

indebted for the rescue from oblivion of the quaint and obscure creed of his forefathers. This circumstance in a measure explains why, at a very early period, and with particular predilection, his name is associated with those magical and legendary tales with which Iceland, perhaps more than any other country, abounds. Many of them have for their object to contrast the power, wisdom, and goodness of God, with the malignity, impotence, and clumsiness of the devil; and there is generally a highly humorous vein running throughout, in which the schemes of the arch-enemy of mankind are held up to derision.

The following, relative to Sæmundr, are culled, with little variation, from Dr. Konrad Maurer's interesting volume on the ghost stories and legends of Iceland.* He, again, has gleaned from various authorities, whose names are given. In the first place we commence with Sæmundr's magical studies:—

Sæmundr Sigfússon, so is it here stated, lived in the *South*, with a celebrated master, by whom he was instructed in various occult arts; but thereby he forgot all that he had learned before, and even his own Christian name. At last the Saint Jón, whilst travelling in the South, heard where he was, and sought him out. Sæmundr at first, when asked for his name, said that it was Kollr; but Jón flatly

told him that he knew him to be Sæmundr Sigfússon, who was born at Oddi, in Iceland, and moreover, when he understood how to persuade him, Sæmundr recovered his recollection of himself, and determined to escape with his countryman. In order, however, to deceive his master, Jón remained for some time in the same town, and often called on him and Sæmundr. At last, in a dark night, they took to flight: on their being missed by the master, he sent in pursuit of them; but they could not be found, nor could he himself read in the stars as was his wont, owing to the heavens being then too cloudy. The two friends travelled the first day and night as well as the following day; but the second night was clear, and then the master could read in the stars where they were, so he immediately set out in pursuit of them. Now, Sæmundr lifts up his eyes towards heaven, saying, "My master is now on his way, and sees where we are!" When Jón asked him what was to be done now? Sæmundr replies, "We must act resolutely: take off one of my shoes from my foot, fill it with water, and place it on my head. Jón did so; but at the same moment the master likewise looked up towards heaven, and said to his companions, "A bad message this! the stranger Jón has drowned my foster son Kollr, for there is water around his star." Saying so, he returned to

his home. The two travellers now continue their journey day and night as before; but in the following night the magician looked once more into the stars, and beheld, to his great astonishment, the star of Sæmundr exactly over his own head. He pursued the fugitives once more, and when Sæmundr became aware of this he said, "The astrologer is again on his way, and we shall be obliged to extricate ourselves as before: take a shoe again off my foot; draw thy knife from its sheath, and stab me in the thigh; fill the shoe with the blood and place it on the crown of my head." Jón did as he was bidden; and when the master looked at Sæmundr's star, he said, "There is now blood around the star of Master Kollr, and there is no doubt but that the stranger has murdered him." Whereupon he returned once more. Arrived at his home, the old man again tried his art, and, perceiving Sæmundr's star shining brightly over his head, said, "My pupil Kollr lives yet, and this is so much the better; but I have taught him quite enough, for he conquers me now in astrology and in magic, and he and Saint Jón may now proceed on their journey happily and in good health, for I am unable to prevent their leaving." Sæmundr consequently continued his journey with Jón, and both returned safely to Iceland.

It is also related that in the middle ages there existed a school of the black art (Swartaskóli), which by some is stated to have been in Germany; by others, however, in Paris. The school is said to have been kept in a subterranean chamber, in which there was no window, so that no ray of light could enter. The scholars were obliged to remain there until they had completed their apprenticeships, which were from three to seven years, without ever being allowed to see the daylight, or to go into the open air; a grey shaggy hand entered every day and gave the pupils their food. They learned their lessons from books written in letters of fire, so that they might be studied in darkness; there was no actual teacher, but it was the devil himself who kept the school. He did not exact a special fee for his teaching, but made it one of his conditions that the pupil who was the last to leave school at the end of every year belonged to him: this was the reason that all the pupils dreaded being last at that time.

There were once at this school three Icelanders together, Sæmundr Sigfússon, Kálfr Arnason, and Hálfdan Einarsson (according to other writers, Eldjárnsson, who at a later period became curate at Fell i Slettuhlid). All three were, according to popular tradition, magicians of great renown.

It so happened that all of them were to leave at the same time, and Sæmundr voluntarily offered to step out last of all. He threw over his shoulders a large cloak, without putting his arms into the sleeves, or fastening it. When the others left the school, and at last Sæmundr was going to follow, the devil stretched out his arm to grasp him: he, however, let his cloak slip off, and ran away from his very hands. Thus he escaped, but the iron door of the apartment banged so close after him, that one of his heels was injured: he then said, "Skall þar hurd nærri hælum," *i. e.* "The door struck too near to the heel;" and these words of his have since become proverbial.

According to another version of this story, which agrees still better with well-known German legends, the sun shone into Sæmundr's face as he was leaving the place, and his shadow fell behind him against the wall. When the devil was going to grasp him, Sæmundr pointed to his shadow, crying, "I am not the last; dost thou not see him who comes after me?" Then the devil, thinking that the shadow was a man, and that Sæmundr had escaped from him, laid hold of the shadow; since that time Sæmundr has been shadowless, for the devil would not part with his shadow.

On the arrival of the three schoolfellows in Den-

mark, they heard that the curacy of Oddi, one of the best in the country, was vacant, and all three applied for the living. The King, not knowing any of them, promised the charge to him who should first arrive at Oddi. Sæmundr immediately invoked the devil, and made himself over to him, on condition that he should swim with him over to the island without wetting the hem of his garment. The devil transformed himself into a seal, Sæmundr placed himself on its broad back, and off they went. On the road Sæmundr kept on reading the Psalms until they had arrived near the coast of the island, when he struck the seal about the ears with his Psalter—the seal immediately sank; he himself, however, swam quietly to the land, and thus got rid of the devil, and received the rich living of Oddi.

During his stay in the Southern countries Sæmundr was betrothed in Saxony to a wise-woman (norn). After his return to Iceland she waited a long time for him, but, as he did not come, she became tired, and thought he had made a fool of her. She then sent to Sæmundr a gilded cask, ordering her messenger not to allow it to be opened by any one but Sæmundr himself. The messenger, who travelled with some merchants, had a very favourable journey, and they arrived at the south of the island, close to Oddi, where Sæmundr officiated as a clergyman.

He was very well aware of their arrival, and was in his church when they called on him. He received them in the most friendly manner, took the casket, and placed it on the altar. He allowed it to stand there over-night; the next day, however, he took it under his arm and carried it up to the highest point of Hekla, where he threw it down. People say, that from that moment Hekla has thrown out fire (pásegja meun ad Hekla hafi fyrst gosid). It is very remarkable that Icelandic annals place the first eruption of Hekla in the year 1104, the forty-eighth year of Sæmundr's life.*

At a later period also Sæmundr had frequent transactions with the devil (Kölski) and his spirits (pukar). A farm-servant of his had the bad habit of swearing very wickedly. Sæmundr told him that the devil and his spirits fed upon curses and opprobrious terms. The servant, in order to test his master's statement, and to deprive the devil of his food, determined he would never more utter curses; and he banished the infernal spirit into the stable. Now, it went very bad with the poor servant, for the spirit did him every imaginable injury, and played him all sorts of tricks to excite him to swear, so that he found it difficult enough to restrain.

For some time he kept his resolution bravely,

* Gudbrandr.

and, perceiving that the spirit really fell away every day, his faith was confirmed, and he ceased to swear. One morning, however, when he entered the stable he found everything in confusion and disorder, and all the cows tied together by the tails; then he fell upon the spirit, and allowed his anger to burst out in horrible words and wicked curses at him. But to his great mortification he saw the spirit, hitherto so sick and miserable, suddenly recover again and become so fat and sleek that he was almost turned into a piece of bacon. He clearly perceived that his parson had told him the truth, and ceased to swear.

Another time, a perfect stranger comes and speaks to a milkmaid in the service of Sæmundr. He offers to do all her work for her during the winter, provided she promises to give him what she carries under her apron. The lass accepts the proposal with pleasure, for she knew that she had neither money nor money's worth beneath her apron; but she had not thought that she was about to become a mother. When the winter came to an end her eyes were opened, and she felt in great trouble; she became dull and silent, and it almost seemed as if she were not in her right mind. Then Sæmundr privately inquired the cause of the change that had come over her. She would not, at first, tell the reason; at last, however, when falsehood was no longer of service, she told him the

whole story of her bargain with the strange man. The parson, who had in fact known the matter long before, told her to cheer up; and added, she need only tell the devil to fetch the water next morning in a basket, and to pass the church door with it, and, if he refused, the contract would be annulled. The girl did as her master told her: the devil went with his basket and cautiously carried the water; but when he arrived at the church door Sæmundr stood ringing the bells, and at their sound all the water flowed out of the basket. The devil three times renewed the attempt; but the result being each time the same, he angrily threw down the basket and disappeared. Of course he never came to demand the milkmaid's child.

Sæmundr obtained his extraordinary power over the hellish spirits in the following manner:—He asked the devil once to how small a size he could reduce himself; the reply was—to the smallness of a fly. Sæmundr now took a gimlet, and, boring a hole into a beam, he commanded the devil to enter it. He did not hesitate, but did so. Sæmundr directly drove a plug into the hole; and however much the devil howled, screamed, and begged for mercy, he would not draw it out until he bound himself to his service for ever.

The parson Sæmundr possessed, among other

things, a pipe on which he only needed to blow when he wanted one or more spirits to attend him. Once he left this pipe in his bedroom; he used to place it under his pillow during the night. When the time came to make the beds Sæmundr told the maid do as usual, but if she found anything odd in his bed she was to take no notice, and to let it lie untouched. The girl in making the bed found the pipe, and could not resist her curiosity. She examined it on all sides, and at last blew into it. A spirit immediately appeared, and said—"What shall I do?" The girl was much frightened, but did not show it: it occurred to her that the fleeces of ten sheep, slaughtered on the same day, lay in front of the house; she told the spirit to count the hairs in these ten fleeces, remarking that if he did that before she finished the rooms she would become his. The spirit went and counted as fast as he could, and the girl was equally active in her work. She finished the room whilst he was still engaged counting the hairs on the tail of one of the fleeces, and thus, of course, he lost his promised recompence. The parson praised the girl much, on account of her ingenious expedient, when she told him the story.

The devil did not, however, much like the constant servitude to which he had been compelled by

Sæmundr, and so much the less as he found himself always overreached, and therefore often attempted to avenge himself, but never succeeded. Once he transformed himself into a small gnat, and placed himself between the cream and the milk in the parson's cup, thinking that he would be swallowed with the milk, and then that he could kill him. But Sæmundr had scarcely touched the cup before he spied the gnat; he wrapped it up in the cream and put it into a bag made of the skin that covered a newborn calf. He then carried the discomfited demon to church, placing him on the altar, and there obliged him to listen patiently whilst the parson was saying mass, for the bag was not opened till after it was over, when he allowed the *black man* to escape. It is said that the devil never was more uncomfortable than during the time he was thus kept by Sæmundr on the altar.

On another occasion the parson bet the devil that he could not give him a line, either in Latin or Icelandic, to which he would not be able immediately to find rhyme; pledging his soul to that effect. The devil thereupon made several attempts to catch him, but could never succeed. Once he abruptly said to him, "*Nunc tibi deest gramen;*" but Sæmundr answered without hesitation, "*Digito tu terge foramen!*" Another time the devil placed himself astride

on the gable of the church roof, and said, "*Hæc domus est alta;*" but Sæmundr directly answered, "*Si vis descendere, salta!*" Again, the devil observed the parson drinking out of a horn, and cried "*Nunc bibis ex cornu.*" Sæmundr, not having a Latin rhyme at hand, and not wishing to be beaten, resolutely mixed some Icelandic with the Latin, and said, "*Vidisti quomodo fór nú?*" (i.e., "*Hast thou seen what is now done?*") The *black man* could not recognise this mixture of languages, and maintained that he had gained the wager; but after a long wrangle Sæmundr proved to him that the words "fór nú" were correct Latin. Now the devil attempts to try him with the Icelandic, and immediately says to the parson—

"Allt er runninn út í botn
áttúngr med hreina vatn."

(*i. e.* "All the clean water has run quite out from the little pitcher.")

The latter immediately answers thus:—

"Allt er vald hjá einum drottn',
á hans nád ei verdur sjatn."

(*i. e.* "All the power is with the one Lord, there is no decrease in his mercy.")

The black man, seeing himself beaten in these rhyming trials of strength, made no further attempts.

A second story refers to the struggles of Sæmundr with the Evil One. Once he played with him at hide-

and-seek (átti felíngaleik vid Kölska). The devil hid himself under a piece of turf in front of the church. Sæmundr discovered him there, stepped on the turf, and caught him. The parson then hid himself in his pulpit, which was a place where the devil could not come, and so the latter lost twice.

Despite of all his cunning, Sæmundr was liable to be outdone, though not by the devil, by a woman. He had once related to his servants that there was each day (some say Saturday only) a particular *wishing-time* (óskastund), in which one might obtain by a wish whatever he wanted; the time, however, lasted only a single second, and this was the reason that it was so rarely hit upon. Now, some time after, he sat in his sitting-room whilst the maid-servants were there at their work. He suddenly cried, "Now, ye maidens, the wishing-time has arrived; each of you may wish what she pleases." Then one of them cried out aloud, and said—

"Eina vild' eg eiga mèr
óskina svo góda,
ad eg ætti synina sjö
med Sæmund' hinum fróda."

(*i. e.* "I should like to make a good wish; namely, that I may have seven sons by the learned Sæmundr.")

Sæmundr, angry at this wish, cried out immediately, "I wish that thou mayest die in bringing

forth the last." Both these wishes were ultimately fulfilled, for Gudrum, the maiden in question, became, at a later period, the parson's wife, and they had seven sons; at the birth of the last of whom the woman died.

It is related of her, by the way, that her good luck made her very haughty, and she is said, among other things, to have answered a poor man who asked her for a draught of milk—

"Gakktú i ána, gódurinn minn,
Thad gjörir biskups hesturinn."

(*i. e.* "Go thou down to the brook, good friend, as the bishop's horse does.")

Sæmundr had the greatest trouble imaginable to keep her haughtiness within proper bounds.

Such are the principal legends connected with the life of Sæmundr the Learned, and they form a very fair specimen of Icelandic legendary lore, which, coupled with the Scriptures and Sagas, are their chief source of recreation on their long winter evenings, when, clustered round a dim oil-lamp, one of the family reads aloud, and the remainder spin, knit, and weave; the day-time being devoted to domestic labours and the education of the children, which is enforced by law, but without much need; such is their natural thirst for knowledge that there are few

who cannot both read and write Danish as well as their own language,—ignorance being alike considered a crime and disgrace both to parent and child.

CHAPTER XVIII.

STORUVELLIR, HRAUNGEROI, REYKIR, REYKJAVIK.

Clerical hospitality — Cross the Thiorsá — Reach Olafsvellir — A pastor of ungainly exterior but polished mind — Cross the marshes — Covies of ptarmigan — Hraungeroi — Position of the clergy — Wretchedness of the churches — People well taught — Icelandic produce — The Handels-ted — Care for the ravens — Ferry over the Huitá — Glen of Reykir — Story of Thorgunna — Trial of the ghosts — Description of "Little Geyser" — The "Magic Heaps" — Heathen notions — An unwilling ice-bath — Return to Reykjavik.

Storuvellir, September 13th.—NOTHING could exceed the kindness of the clergyman, who evidently possessed one of the best livings in the land; but I paid dearly for it, as he would insist on my remaining to breakfast, and, afraid of offending him by a refusal, I lost my day and all chance of reaching Reykir that evening: not that it was any great hardship to discuss salmon-trout and ptarmigan, but I was anxious about the steamer, for I knew it ought to leave Reykjavik on the return trip about the 15th. However, I got away at nine, my host insisting on accompanying me to the banks of the Thiorsá, which I

crossed considerably lower down than in going to Hekla, and a few miles above a very extensive salmon-curing establishment, worked and belonging to a Glasgow firm—the fish hereabout being remarkably fine and numerous. The ford is at least a mile in extent, and in many places uncomfortably deep. Traversing the bank of the river for a considerable distance, amongst a succession of very rich grass-lands, studded with numerous well-to-do farms, where all were busy with their hay-harvest, still far behindhand, we passed a few miles to the southward of Skalholt and struck due west across a lake district—in which were many swan—for Olafsvellir, where we arrived about three in the afternoon, making, as usual, for the clergyman's house. I was not a little astonished by his addressing me in very good English, which he had taught himself during the long winter evenings. Whilst the accustomed coffee was preparing he showed me his library, well stocked with French, German, English, and Danish books, besides numerous Icelandic volumes. All these languages he read with perfect ease, and, of course, talked Danish, as well as his mother-tongue (nearly all Icelanders do), and expressed himself pretty well in French and English; considering he was self-educated, and living a secluded life in these wilds, he was a very fair linguist, and well

posted in European history and politics. A hunchback, nature seemed to have endowed his mind at the expense of his body, which was anything but gainly. After an hour's talk, in which he touched on everything from the "Great Eastern" to the late campaign, he insisted on accompanying me half way to Hraungeroi, a church three hours distant on this side the Huitá, where he advised me to sleep, and leave Reykir until the following day, as it was still very distant and a bad road.

We soon entered a vast lava-district,—an offshoot from the range to the south of Thingvalla, which here advances in a lofty elbow towards the east, having at its base the deep and rapid Huitá, flowing through a channel between the mountain and lava-field. Having seen me to the end of the lava and about half-way to my destination, as well as aired his English to his entire satisfaction, my friend, after a cordial farewell, turned his pony's head; and as he rode away and half askew grinned his adieux, I could not help gazing on his extraordinarily quaint appearance: crouched on his saddle-bow like a Cossack, in a rabbit-skin cap and bottle-green cloak, with a pair of stockings drawn over his shoes and trousers, and a rat of a pony to correspond, he certainly was the most unclerical looking Padre I ever beheld. One would hardly have taken him for one of the most cultivated of his race;

but Iceland is not the only place in which one meets with knowledge where one least expects it, and seldom has it been sought from purer motives than by this denizen of the Arctic circle.

Our route now lay across a succession of marshes, where, oddly enough, in the very centre, I found two large covies of ptarmigan, and subsequently killed nearly all of them. At nine we arrived at Hraungeroi, where I was welcomed by another well-to-do parson, in the possession of a very decent little church. Clean sheets and eider-down were the order of the day. My host was a regular "Boniface" in appearance, with larder to correspond: in fact, if you arrange matters well in travelling in this country, you can generally halt for the night at a very passable clerical establishment; for, though the numerous body of clergy generally receive a very poor stipend, the glebe-land annexed to the parish churches is in many places very considerable —some few livings being worth as much as 400*l.* a year, equal to the governor's salary. It would be difficult to convey a just idea of the wretchedness of some of the edifices which here bear the name of a church; but with a very scattered population they have wisely had a view to utility rather than ornament, and it may safely be stated that there are no rural districts in Europe in which the spiritual wants

of the masses have been so well and so practically cared for as in this country, or where the beau ideal of religion—which after all is only the means of attaining an end, namely, the leading of a guileless life—is more nearly approximated. Crime is almost unknown save in the way of rare cases of petty theft, and with few exceptions their domestic life is blameless, except in the seaports, which here as elsewhere draw a God-forsaken population. Drunkenness is their only vice; but they cannot easily afford it, or have the opportunity of often indulging, unless it be amongst those in the immediate vicinity of the trading stations. Inebriety is not, as with us, attended with violence and brutality, but generosity and stupidity; and, at the annual barterings or fairs, the traders take a mean advantage of this weakness in driving their bargains, and, having first robbed their customers of their senses, relieve them of their produce under the mask of a nominal purchase: exactly as in America in former days, and in New Zealand but a few years since, our countrymen, under the cloak of the Gospel and the influence of liquor, brought the law to witness the purchase of principalities for a cask of rum or tobacco, or a bale of blankets.

Icelandic produce consists chiefly of wool and dried cod or kippered salmon, eider-down, oil, and tallow; which they barter for coffee, corn-brandy, snuff, and

bread-stuff of the coarsest description, and a few other European commodities. Towards the end of June the Handels-ted or period of traffic commences, and all Icelanders prepare for their journey to the trading stations, where they are accustomed to carry on business. By that time their ponies have recovered from their annual winter fast, and the sheep have had their wool torn off their backs in a most unceremonious manner, not being shorn as with us; and, having no particular labour to keep them at home, and the roads and torrents relieved of their winter snows becoming passable, they gather together in large caravans of sixty or seventy ponies, and generally make for Reykjavik, where they not only find greater competition than at the isolated trading stations on the coast, but enjoy the annual gathering, encamping in the vicinity of the town. Previous to the transfer of the Althing, this fair took place at Thingvalla, and assumed the form of a grand annual festival, after the affairs of the assembly were terminated; but matters are changed now, and the wily trader, taking care to keep his victim in perpetual debt, with the aid of a disinterested administration of the favourite corn-brandy, has it all his own way, to the disadvantage of the unfortunate native, who barters away for a mere song the "wadamel," or home-made cloth, and the mits and

stockings—the result of the labours of the entire family during the long winter evenings.

Sept. 14*th.*—I was awoke this morning by a croaking chorus of ravens, who were disputing the right to breakfast off the contents of my game-bag, which had been suspended outside my bedroom window. Poor indeed must be the Icelandic dwelling that does not boast a pair of these household gods, who are always kindly treated and encouraged, and generally mount guard over the highest point of the house, taking the place of the geese in ancient Rome: they often give warning of the approach of strangers before the lazier dogs have left the hearthstone. This morning's strife originated between the pair belonging to the house and the pair which honoured the churchyard with their presence. This unseemly broil I abbreviated by shooting one at the request of the clergyman, when the remaining three, sinking their differences, commenced to breakfast off their defunct relative.

An hour's ride brought us to the ferry over the Huitá, kept by the clergyman of the church on its banks, his son plying the oars from which his father's chief source of revenue is derived. Broad and deep, this famous salmon-river joins the sea a few miles below at Eyrarbacka, the chief harbour and trading station on the southern coasts, whose stores are distinctly visible on the low narrow

sand-spit which forms this dangerous port, almost surrounded by foam and breakers on this stormy day.

We were now skirting the feet of the vast range south of Thingvalla; and, to add to our misery, we became most hopelessly bogged in the morass betwixt the river-side and the mountain, whilst the rising hurricane was driving the sleet into our eyes almost to blindness. Dismounting, it was upwards of an hour before we traced our way out of this slimy labyrinth, and eventually arrived in the wild romantic glen of Reykir, or "Little Geyser" as it is often called, snugly ensconced in a fork of the mountains.

I made my quarters in the church as comfortable as I could under the circumstances; and for the present was content with watching from the window an eruption of the principal spring, called par excellence "Little Geyser," as it played for about three minutes, at an altitude varying from forty to thirty feet; and then, committing myself to a bundle of hay, hoped for better weather in the morning. My guide, however, was not altogether happy; and at last, after fidgeting about for some time, when recommended to take up his sleeping quarters, pointed in a significant manner to a coffin in the vicinity of the altar—not that there was anything in it save the

clergyman's gown suspended to a nail, as it stood on its end in obedience to an old superstition before alluded to; but he wished to sleep in the house, and had not such an implicit belief in the orderly conduct of Icelandic ghosts as I who was well up in the ghostly lore of his country. I knew, however, that they had evinced a profound respect for the civil law ever since the great case of "Kiartan *versus* Spectres," when the ghostly party were ignominiously defeated, and sentence formally pronounced against them by a jury of Icelanders.

Lest the reader should doubt this fact, I will narrate the particulars of this remarkable trial, as it is handed down to us in the Eyrbyggja Saga.* It tells how, shortly after the introduction of the Faith, there chanced to winter in a haven near Helgafells (which we passed on our return from Snæfells on the southern shores of Breida Fiord) a vessel, on board of which was an old Hebridean crone named Thorgunna, gaunt and mystical in appearance, with weird features and a profusion of black hair; but her wardrobe was for the age remarkably gorgeous, and excited the cupidity of Thurida, sister of the Pontiff Snorro (Godi) and wife of Thorodd, who lived at Froda hard by. She induced the new arrival to take

* See Sir Walter Scott's translation in Mallet's 'Northern Antiquities.'

up her abode there, in hopes of wheedling her out of her chattels either by purchase or otherwise; but Thorgunna contented herself with being generally useful in return for her board and lodging, and would part with nothing. Even when asked to sell her silken bed-furniture and tapestried hangings, by her covetous hostess, she replied, "Believe me I will not lie upon straw to feed thy pomp and vanity." Grave and silent, she mixed little with the household, and evinced an especial dislike for two of its members—Thorar, familiarly termed "Wooden Leg," having lost one of his limbs in a skirmish, and his wife, who, from her supposed skill in enchantment, was dubbed the "Wicked Sorceress."

Kiartan, son of Thurida, was the only inmate for whom she showed the slightest affection, which the rude boy much vexed her by not returning.

All, however, went on smoothly until haymaking time, when, the whole family being one day in the field engaged in turning the hay in anticipation of a heavy shower, Thorodd told them to cock it as fast as possible. The storm swept down, darkening the air, and a heavy shower descended. No sooner did the sun break forth again than they found to their dismay that it had rained blood. That which fell on the cocks soon dried up; but Thorgunna, neglecting Thorodd's injunctions, left her portion spread out on

the field, and it remained dripping with gore, which so preyed on her nerves that she took to her bed and shortly died, having previously made her landlord Thorodd her residuary legatee. "Let my body," said she, "be transported to Skalholt, for my mind presages that in that place shall be founded the most distinguished church in this island. Let my golden ring be given to the priest who shall celebrate my obsequies, and do thou indemnify thyself for the funeral charges out of my remaining effects.

"To thy wife I bequeath my purple mantle, in order that, by this sacrifice to her avarice, I may secure the right of disposing of the rest of my effects at my own pleasure.

"But for my bed, with its coverings, hangings, and furniture, I entreat they may all be consigned to the flames. I do not desire this because I envy any one the possession of these things after my death, but because I wish those evils to be avoided which I plainly foresee will happen if my will be altered in the slightest particular."

Thorodd prepared to carry out the will to the letter, when his wife entered, and endeavoured to deter him, arguing that it was solely dictated by selfish envy; and eventually, by her blandishments, coaxed him into allowing her to appropriate the much-desired bed-furniture. The remainder was

consigned to the flames, and the body, carefully packed in a coffin, started off to its distant resting-place at Skalholt.

The transporters of the body, arriving late one evening, weary and drenched with rain, at a house called Nether-ness, the niggardly proprietor only offered them house-room; but, shortly after, an unwonted noise was heard in the kitchen, and they then recognised Thorgunna, who was busily employed preparing victuals. Frightened to death, the inhospitable landlord produced abundance, and the apparition disappeared. Without further mishap, and with all due ceremony, Thorgunna was interred at Skalholt; but the consequences of the breach of her testament were severely felt at Froda, for, on the evening of the return of the funeral party, when all were assembled in the chief apartment awaiting their supper, a spectral half-moon appeared, and glided round the walls against the sun, continuing its eccentric course until the whole family retired to rest. This apparition was renewed every night for a week, and was looked upon by all to predict some fearful calamity. The first victim was one of the herdsmen, who showed signs of mental alienation, and was found dead in his bed the following morning; the next, he of the "wooden leg," going out of doors one evening, was grappled by the ghost of the

deceased herdsman, who gave him such an unmerciful licking that he died shortly after of the bruises; his ghost joined the herdsman's in assaulting the inhabitants of Froda, and an infectious disorder broke out, carrying off many. Strange portents were seen within doors: the dried fish flew about the house; the meal was displaced and mixed; and whilst circling round the fire one evening, a spectre in the form of a seal rose out of the floor, bending its round black eyes on the tapestried bed-curtains of Thorgunna, until Kiartan, who alone seemed to wield a spell over these supernatural prodigies, drove it down with a huge forge-hammer, as he would have driven a stake into the earth.

A new calamity speedily followed. Thorodd, absent on a voyage to procure a cargo of dried fish, was capsized in crossing the river Enna, and drowned, together with his boatmen and followers. At the funeral-feast in honour of his memory, their ghosts entered, dripping with water, and ranged themselves round the fire, to the discomfiture of the assembled mortals, who retreated to make room for them. These ghosts did not at first create any great sensation, as those of all drowned persons who are well received by the goddess Rana were wont to show themselves at their funeral-feast, and it was therefore considered a good omen. But when they renewed their visits

after the mourning guests had departed, their ghostly irregularity became irksome.

Thorodd and his comrades marched in on one side drenched as before, and on the other he of the "wooden leg" led in all those who had died of pestilence, covered with dust. Both parties seized the seats by the fire, ousting the proprietors and domestics, who, with Kiartan at their head, were obliged to compound matters, by keeping fires and food for them in the principal hut, whilst they retired to an inferior one.

This continued all the feast of Iol; the disease carrying off victims from time to time, until, out of thirty servants, eighteen died, and five fled for fear of the ghosts, so that only seven remained in the service of Kiartan, who now had recourse for advice to his uncle the Pontiff Snorro. That worthy, in his official capacity, advised judicial measures, which were accordingly instituted; and a "door-doom," or jury of twelve neighbours, as in a case of theft, was assembled at the front door, ready to try the ghosts who held their wonted station round the fire. Kiartan opened the proceedings by fulfilling the incompleted will of Thorgunna, in burning her bed-furniture, and then proceeded to business; charging him of the "wooden leg," Thorodd, and the other ghosts, with molesting his mansion, and introducing death and disease amongst the inhabitants. Everything was

carried on in due form under the superintendence of the Pontiff's son, and a clergyman whom he sent to sanctify the proceedings. The ghosts not deigning to defend themselves, sentence of ejectment was duly and legally pronounced against them individually. When "Wooden-leg" heard the judgment, he arose, and saying, "I have sat while it was lawful for me to do so," left the apartment by the back door. Each of the ghosts, as they heard their sentence, left the place grumbling. Last of all Thorodd was told to depart. He replied, "We have here no longer a peaceful dwelling, therefore will we remove."

Kiartan then entered with his followers, and the priest celebrated a solemn mass, sprinkling the walls with holy water; thereby consummating the discomfiture of the spectres, and vindicating the majesty of the civil power, which would not even submit to ghostly interference.

So much for ancient goblins. Nor was my confidence in the modern ones misplaced, and I slept soundly until dawn, when my guide sneaked in, and, abashed at his own timidity, established himself a few feet from me, in the evident hope that I should be under the impression he had been there the entire night. Neither was I disappointed in the weather; and soon after daylight commenced an inspection of the valley, which, though extensive, and containing

numerous active fountains, was tame and insignificant after those at Haukadal.

This smoky glen, which extends back some miles into the mountains, is on an average half a mile in breadth, and composed of beautifully-veined and vividly-coloured sulphur-clay banks. Here, as at Haukadal, the water-power is apparent on the surface, a river traversing it in its centre; on all sides numerous columns of steam arise from a hundred springs in the many varied stages of geyser existence—a heated surface attests the general decomposition progressing below. Both care and caution are requisite in wandering amongst the old "laugs"—whose delicately-formed arches separate you from the boiling abyss beneath—to the "Little Geyser," that, comparatively isolated, lies under the beetling crags on the right of the valley. In appearance it resembles the mouth of a well, about six feet in its greatest diameter, with scarcely any incrustation round its margin—in this respect like the Strokr, constantly bubbling and grumbling; it has considerably altered its habits of late, emitting about every three hours with considerable regularity. The only other fountain which plays with periodic vehemence breaks out from under a red clay-bank by the side of the river. It is called the Badstofa, and its eruptions, though not so lofty—being ejected in an oblique

direction—are more constant and voluminous, seldom lasting more than a minute. It bursts out after every five or six, in a magnificent bouquet of water and steam, when the water in the basin retires out of sight until a series of rumblings and detonations announce its approach. The other springs, though numerous, are of minor importance; but it is unsafe to wander amongst them, as at irregular intervals and directions they throw up spasmodic jets quite sufficient to form a very disagreeable hot bath. The incrustations and petrifactions of this valley are much more beautiful than any I had yet seen, especially those of the grasses and mosses which flourish near the margins of the fountains; but, delicate and brittle, are too fragile to stand Icelandic travelling. Of the many physical evils to which this island is subjected, none are more alarming than the earthquake, which not only causes destruction itself, but too often precedes volcanic eccentricity. Few districts in the island have suffered more than this, lying exactly in the line of subterranean communication between the eastern yökuls, Hekla, the volcanic range of the Guldbringe Syssel, which we shall cross to-day on our way to Reykjavik, and the subaqueous vent off Cape Reykianæs. We have repeated accounts in the history of the island of the devastation spread by their agencies in the district of Olfus, in which these springs

are situated. At Mossfell, a few miles to the north, where mountains are excessively rent and distorted by repeated shocks, a hot spring broke out sixty feet in diameter, to be subsequently destroyed by the same agencies; and in the latter end of the eighteenth century the lake of Thingvalla, which lies about ten miles to the north, had its bed shaken; sinking to the north-east, it encroached considerably on the valley, whilst towards the south-west, where the depth was formerly four fathoms, it became almost dry.

But as the eruption of Skaptar was the most dreadful of any on record, so the earthquakes which followed the year after were by far the most destructive: in Arness Syssel alone, where we now stand, no fewer than 372 farms were more or less destroyed, and throughout the island, nineteen churches and upwards of fourteen hundred houses met the same fate. The courses of rivers were changed, old boiling springs were dislocated, and at Haukadal alone thirty-five new ones burst forth, and, coupled with the revels of the eruption, produced that ghastly period of famine before alluded to.

At eight o'clock we started over the mountains for Reykjavik, a nominal seven hours' ride. Breasting a steep ascent immediately above the left-hand bank of the valley, we soon found ourselves on the summit of one of the gloomiest and most inhospitable regions

I had yet traversed, which forms part of the long irregular and shapeless range extending from Thingvalla lake to Krisuvik. Taking a last look at old Hekla still frowning behind us, and the angry-looking floods which debouch in the plains beneath, we push on as if we had the most delicate green-sward beneath us, instead of a ringing clattering causeway. Those red slag conical craters on our left are the "Magic Heaps," and from them came the memorable eruption which took place whilst the Althingsmen were deliberating, in a stormy meeting, whether they should embrace Christianity or not. Then, we are told, in the midst of the debate a messenger rushed in with the fearful intelligence that the fire had burst out in the neighbourhood and was consuming all before it, which those arguing in favour of idolatry immediately interpreted as a manifestation from their offended deities; and how Snorro Godi, who, though a pagan, read in the blasted cliff and yawning abysses by which they were surrounded a refutation of the argument, exclaimed, "At what then were the gods angry at the period when the very lava on which we now stand was burning?" To this unanswerable question—for all saw that the surrounding district must once have been a molten sea—as well as the defection of one of their most powerful supporters, may be attributed the downfall of the heathen party,

and the almost unanimous acceptation of the faith: a fact which perhaps illustrates more than anything else the force of character of these old Norse pioneers, who, finding the religion of their fathers wholly untenable when weighed with reason and argument, unhesitatingly adopted the purer and better one offered to them.

Singularly enough, the reindeer from Lapland, turned out on the island in the hopes of getting up a herd of that useful animal, took to this deserted district, and, after a time, established themselves in the interior; but they are now rarely seen, if any indeed exist, as war was covertly waged against them by the peasants, not only as an article of food, but on account of their killing the sheep wherever they interfered with their grazing.

After two hours we commence to descend this elevated lava-field, almost as abruptly as we had mounted, and entered some very old lava-streams coming from the more southern portion of the range, and extending nearly to Vatna, a lake on the high ground above Reykjavik. The ptarmigan were now so abundant that I killed thirty couple from my pony as I rode along. Crossing a river hereabouts in a heedless manner, my castles in the air came to a rather abrupt termination; for my pony, either tired or careless, walked deliberately into

a sort of well lying in the centre of the river, formed by the falling in of a lava-dome. I suddenly found myself and pony struggling heels over head in an ice-bath; but a few seconds brought us to the surface, and we both got out with a little difficulty, and, skirting a bunch of singular chimneys, about eight feet in height, formed by the gases in the cooling of the lava, gained a glimpse of the Esian range and distant lake, from which the Salmon River takes its rise. Feeling myself once more at home, I picked out the freshest pony, and, leaving my guide to follow, was in Reykjavik by five o'clock, after an absence of thirty days, during which time I had ridden over some seven or eight hundred miles, many of which had been untrodden by Englishmen since the early part of the present century.

CHAPTER XIX.

Leisure for fishing and leave-taking — Monotonous Iceland winter — Love of the inhabitants for Copenhagen — Danish affinities — The future of Iceland — Agricultural capabilities — Mineral and piscatorial wealth — Probable post in the North-Atlantic telegraph line — Proposed route of the line — Its strategic advantages — Review of my sojourn in the far North.

Reykjavik, September 16th.—On my arrival yesterday evening I found that the steamer was at Hafna Fiord shipping horses and sulphur, and advertised to sail on the 19th, thereby affording me three days to make my adieux and enjoy the fishing, which I prosecuted with great success, taking numerous grilse and scores of fine sea-trout. I was warmly greeted on all sides, and most hospitably entertained and well laughed at for my audacity and failure at Snæfells Yokül; but my character was considered redeemed by having pushed through the journey alone, and entirely on my own resources. In spite of the natural geniality of my entertainers a gloom loomed through their revels, which no amount of health-drinking could banish, namely, the thought that on

the immediate departure of the steamer they were severed from Copenhagen, which is their Europe, for many a long and dreary month, until their monotonous winter passed, when they would once more resume relations with the living world. And I could not help observing how their old characteristics were waning before the facilities of increased communication. Several were going to Copenhagen for the winter: this only made those obliged to remain behind more unhappy, and I verily believe the town would have migrated bodily, had it been possible; but be it remembered, at the same time, that the Danish element is stronger in Reykjavik than elsewhere: nearly all are intermarried with Danish families.

Having offered during my narrative brief sketches of the past and present of this interesting island, I may now be allowed to glance at its future. In agriculture few steps can be made, as grain will not ripen; as for their pastures, nothing can be richer or sweeter than the grasses: clovers have, in some places, been introduced with advantage, and the Danish Government evinces a laudable desire to assist in stimulating agricultural industry, but natural causes are ever at work to interfere with any extensive system of draining or improvement.

Its mineral and piscatorial wealth are comparatively

undeveloped, and only wait the magic influences of capital and enterprise to cause a great—I will not say moral—improvement amongst the inhabitants. Its sulphur must also of necessity become of considerable importance, as the exhaustion of the Sicilian supply is a mere matter of time; and were we cut off from that depôt by the chances of war, the position of Iceland would be especially favourable for our markets; and it is a subject of considerable congratulation that all the mines of the island are in the hands of an English capitalist.

Whether any of the various species of surturbrand may be made available for steam-fuel is yet a matter of uncertainty, but the enterprising owners of the mail steamer are about to make a trial from one of the extensive beds laid bare in the cliffs near Seiders Fiord, where it can be shot into a vessel lying beneath.

Enough has been previously said regarding the fisheries to demonstrate their importance, as offering almost inexhaustible supplies of salmon and cod; and as the latter is at present almost in the hands of the French, so our Scotch countrymen are monopolizing the former—year by year increasing their preserving establishments on the principal rivers.

But in these days of universal telegraphy, not the least important feature in Iceland will be its adoption as one of the chain of posts by which Europe

and America may become united by a commercial telegraph. I use the words commercial telegraph advisedly; as, though it is a scientific fact that messages have passed beneath the Atlantic, the length of that line, 2050 miles, is not only too great for our present telegraphic power, but could never be even laid by a mercantile company without great and unwholesome Government assistance, and then could not pass a sufficient number of messages in the twenty-four hours to offer an adequate remuneration, unless at most exorbitant prices, which the commercial world would hardly avail themselves of.

The manifest advantages of a North Atlantic telegraph would be, that four electrical circuits would be obtained, none of greater length than 600 miles; and as submarine telegraphs now working at greater lengths demonstrate the possibility of complete insulation and retardation up to that distance, whereas, when we get beyond the 1000 miles, all is doubt and conjecture—to say nothing of the hazard attendant on the enterprise, and the advantage of having to re-lay a portion instead of the whole length of the line in the event of a fracture—the superiority of this route cannot fail to command attention.

The honour of originating the North Atlantic line belongs wholly to Colonel Shaffner of the United States, who, in 1854, obtained a cession from the

Danish Government of exclusive telegraphic rights in the Faroes, Iceland, and Greenland.

His proposed route is as follows:—

	Miles.
From Scotland to the Faroes	250
Faroes to Iceland	350
Iceland to Greenland	550
Greenland to coast of Labrador ..	600

Now, with regard to the objections that may be advanced against this line, there are only two worthy of notice, namely, the icebergs of these northern coasts, and the submarine volcanic line of the south-western extreme of Iceland. The latter may be easily avoided by landing the cable on any of the many eligible spots between Portland and Cape Reykianæs, and thence carrying the line across country to any part of Faxe Fiord. All this portion of the coasts is free from icebergs, and the shore-ice occasionally formed in the winter is inconsiderable; and, besides, it has been already demonstrated in the Baltic and American lakes that shore-ice does not interfere with the working of submarine lines.

With regard to any local electrical difficulties to be surmounted, it must be remembered that, as far as our present knowledge goes, they are only conjectural; and when it is added that the bottom in these regions is for the most part composed of sand and mud,

and nowhere of a greater depth than 2000 fathoms,* the only wonder is that this north-about route was not first adopted. Whether Europe and America will ever be connected by way of the Aleutians is very problematic, both from the volcanic activity which distinguishes that chain as well as the vast extent of icy and uninhabited country through which the American end of the line must pass—to say nothing of the national policy of the Russian government: the North Atlantic line commends itself, not only on commercial, but strategic grounds, as being the immediate link between our kith and kin, the Canadas —with whom it is devoutly to be hoped, in common with Australia, New Zealand, and the Cape, kindred ties may never be severed—but, cemented by laws, language, and religion, and bound by offensive and defensive treaties for mutual preservation, we may form one Empire, as unlike the priest-ridden despotisms of the Old World as the tyrannising democracies of the New.

September 19th.—Though my sojourn in the far North may be only reckoned by weeks, the open-hearted hospitality which everywhere welcomed me, from the Governor to the peasant, had converted those weeks into years, as regards identifying myself with

* The expedition since employed to sound this line found much less depth of water than had been anticipated.

their island-home, and the many sympathies which their peculiar position demands. For, in world-wide experience of wandering by sea and land, I have seldom met a community less influenced by ulterior objects, or whose innate ingenuousness more commended itself at first sight—for their very weaknesses deserve to be tenderly considered, and certainly, as a Britisher, I felt no right to throw stones; and it was with feelings of poignant regret that I mechanically followed my portmanteau to the steamer, and turned my back on Iceland.

Natural Arch—Portland Head.

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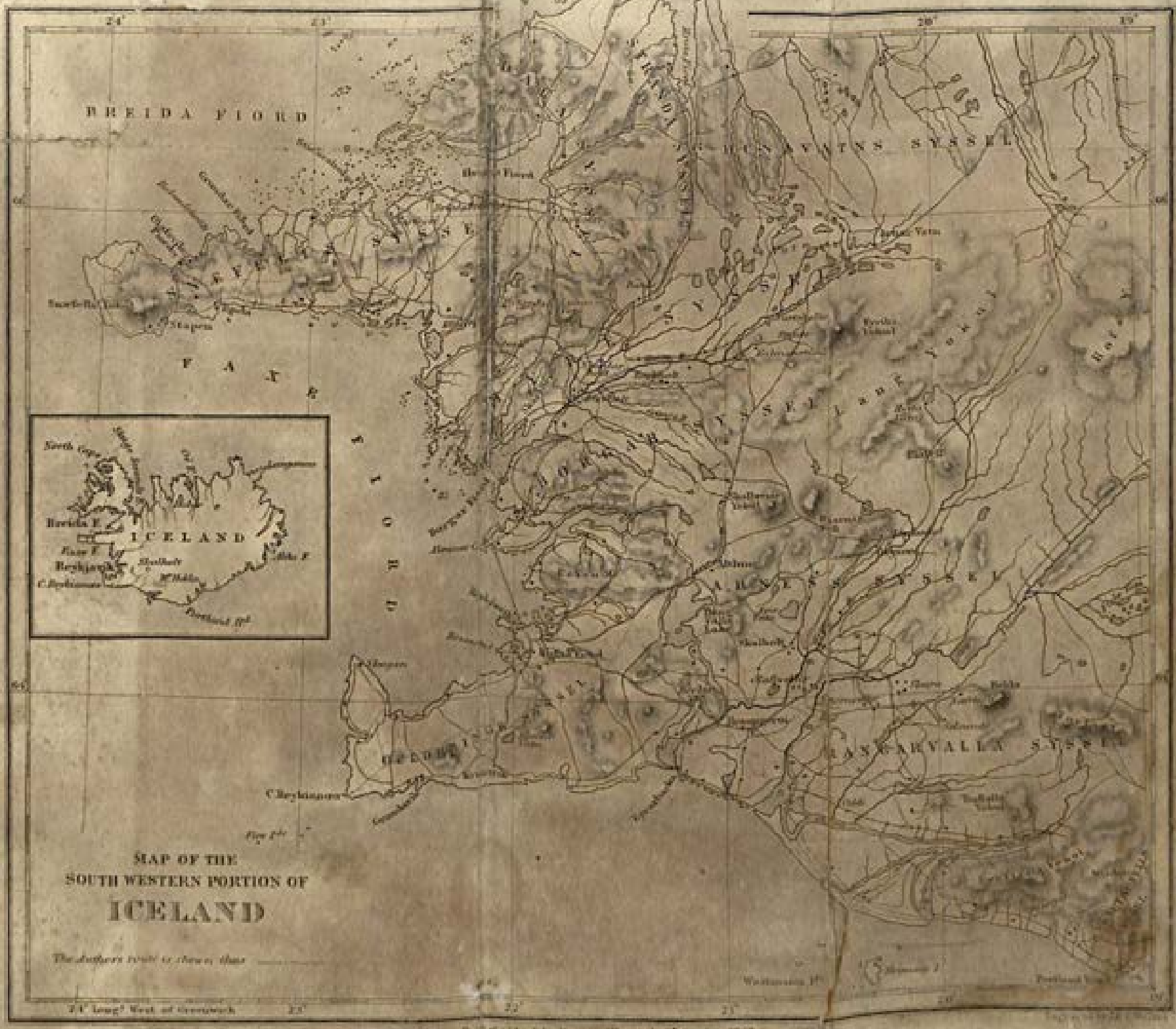
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